

HINDUISM TODAY

July/August/September, 2007 US\$5.95

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



Malaysian Festival Draws 1.4 Million



COVER: Young men depart the Sungei Batu River with blessed pots of milk they will offer to Lord Murugan after climbing the 272 steps of Batu Caves Temple for Thai Pusam festival; (above) a traditional *patti* painter at work in an Orissa village

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SARVAJIT, THE ALL-CONQUERING YEAR

Bodhinatha Veylanswami
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Thai Pusam 2007

Batu Caves, Malaysia



Thai Pusam Day: On February 1, 2007, a million devotees gathered at Batu Caves outside Kuala Lumpur. We see them here streaming past the 140-foot-tall statue of Lord Murugan and up 272 steps to the cave temple.

Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Yoga for all: Swami Ramdev connects easily with the common man. His charm, sense of humor and clear, simple teachings on yoga are a big hit. At this UK workshop, he raises funds for his India projects



Nose ring: Wear it if you want to

USA

Rights in the Workplace

HINDU WOMEN IN THE US who wish to wear their nose ring to work probably have the right to do so, on religious grounds. In recent times Christians and Muslims in America have been successfully putting

their religion's rules for conduct into action in the workplace. Target Stores has accommodated Muslims' refusal to check out pork products, by giving them another job in the store. Walgreens is honoring some pharmacists' refusal to dispense such drugs as the "morning after" pill on the grounds that they are opposed to abortion. This latter issue is a sticky point of law; some states are requiring pharmacists to fill any prescription, while others are not.

Another large retailer, whose policy strictly limits jewelry and makeup worn by employees, allowed a Hindu woman to wear

a nose ring but did not permit another employee to wear a tongue ring as part of her religion's requirement of daily suffering.

In another precedent-setting case, a Jehovah's Witness, whose faith forbids weapons, was awarded unemployment benefits after quitting his job because he was assigned to work on tank turrets.

DIASPORA

INDIA/UK

Young Swami Envisions New World Health

SWAMI RAMDEV MAHARAJ HAS an ambitious and laudable mission to bring the health principles of yoga and ayurveda to the Indian masses and to the world at large. After years of sadhana, Swami established the Patanjali Yog Peeth and Divya Yog Mandir complex in Kankhal (near Haridwar, India). His rise in popularity has been spectacular; his open-air classes draw thousands. According to UK correspondent Krishana Gopal

Dutt, "He is the most popular man in India!"

In April, 2006, Swami held a conference in Kankhal and announced plans for a 150-acre site 15 miles from Haridwar, to include a hospital, dispensary, university, library, accommodations for 4,000 and the largest kitchen in the world. Swami plans to fund the project with workshops abroad. He completed a six-week tour in the UK in July/August 2006, presenting his teachings simultaneously in English and Hindustani to huge crowds. The message is simple "To lead a happy life it is important to maintain good health," through asanas and pranayama. For more see:

<http://www.divyayoga.com/>



Ram Sethu: Google Earth image of the limestone shoal between South India and Sri Lanka, now threatened with breach

INDIA/SRI LANKA

Controversy Rages Over Rama's Bridge

THE LAND BRIDGE BETWEEN India and Sri Lanka, now underwater, is scheduled to be breached in the US\$50 billion Sethusamudram dredging operation to create a continuous navigational channel between East and West India and eliminate the 30 hours' sail time needed to go around Sri Lanka.

Hindus are protesting that the bridge is a sacred historical religious monument. Scientists

and ecologists are concerned that the loss of Ram Sethu, which has provided a powerful dampening effect on tsunamis, will endanger India's coastline and that the enormous mineral and marine resources of the area will also be negatively affected. Others point out that an arbitrary border between India and Sri Lanka will impact local maritime communities on both sides who have heretofore moved freely in those waters. Navy and Coast Guard control will be much more difficult.

The project was initiated by the Indian government without scientific studies or public hearings. For more, google "Save Ramsetu."

INTERNATIONAL

First Global Chinmaya Youth Camp

PRITHIVIRAJ FROM THE UK reports, "Soft morning sunshine and the warmth of the 1,008 names of Prabhu welcomed our hearts to a new day, a new year and a new beginning. Seven days, seven powers, one full week of contentment, love, devotion and understanding. Our first global Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (Chyk) intensive

camp commenced with 70 youth doing Maha Vishnu pooja in early morning on the first day of the year 2007." Held during the last week of 2006 and January 1, 2007, the Chinmaya Youth camp in Coimbatore brought together 70 young people from all over the world. Prithiviraj says, "It was an unforgettable week of pure devotion and deepest inspiration. Each day Swami Swaroopananda, assisted by Br. Rishi Chaitanya, spoke to us about a different Deity. The intensive camp was truly inspirational, an amazing way to end 2006 and welcome the new year, 2007."



Deity worship: Hands-on puja, visualizations, festival enactments

GENETICS

The Basque Connection

OXFORD UNIVERSITY RESEARCHER Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer claims that three-quarters of Britons' genes were

inherited from the Basques of northern Spain, who followed the receding glaciers north some 15,000 years ago to become the first inhabitants of the thawing polar desert. He states that the subsequent immigrations of Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans "contributed no more than five percent to the gene pool."

If his findings are true, another popular belief becomes myth overnight, as Celts, Scots, Irish, Cornish and English are virtually all the same blood—and it's not Anglo-Saxon.

Some researchers contend that the genes of Europeans are too similar to make such a postulation. But one person has pointed out that Basque and Welsh, two of the oldest living languages, have marked linguistic similarities.

DNA research has similarly rewritten the history of India's peoples.



The first post-ice age UK residents may have been Basque



Blessings: 30-foot tall Ganesha in downtown San Francisco

USA

Lord Ganesha at Macy's

FROM MARCH 30 TO APRIL 14, 2007, MACY'S PUT ON ITS 61st Annual Flower Show, "inviting visitors to 'Imagine India' and celebrate the county's vibrant colors, distinctive style, seductive sounds, delicious food and amazing flowers. From the opulence and grandeur of India's golden palaces, to the excitement of Mumbai's nightlife, to the intoxicating beauty of the spice markets, India is a country on the cutting edge that has maintained a strong connection to its rich history. In a salute to India's rich spiritual heritage, visitors are greeted by a 30-foot tall statue of Ganesh above the Geary Street entrance. A 75-foot curtain of lights serves as the backdrop to the beloved figure and puts on an impressive five-minute light show of color and blooms."



Elegant design: Lord Ayyappa's new home in Pretoria, South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA

Saranam Ayyappa!

IN 1997, THE PRETORIA BHANAI Mandram dedicated itself to building South Africa's first Ayyappan Temple. Devotees purchased 15.1 hectares of land and developed a prodigious plan for a traditional Hindu temple, along with a clinic, sports facilities, a youth center, a residence for the elderly, a

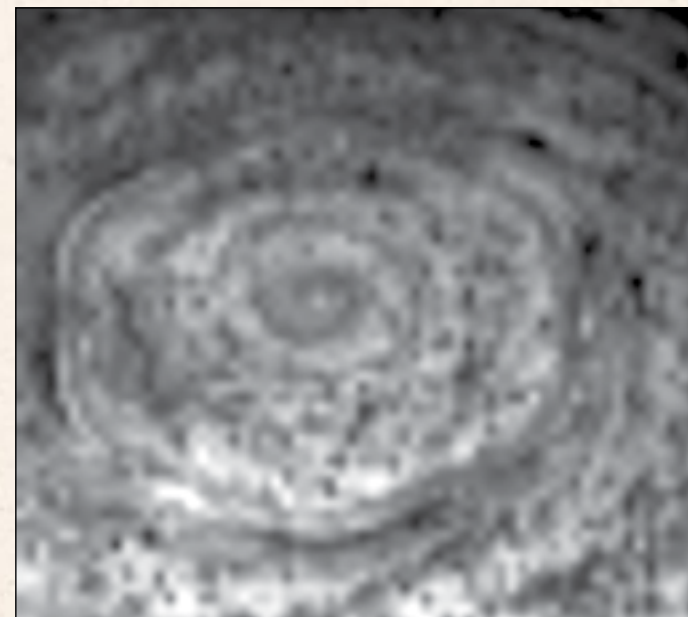
spiritual library, auditorium, conference facilities and a crematorium.

In 2001, Dr. R. Kolapan, D. Dherman, K. M. Pillay and Njaanasagren Govender visited India and presented the plans to the Shankaracharya of Kanchi for His blessing and had them reviewed by world-famous temple architect Muthiah Sthapati. The temple is to be completed in July, 2007. The official opening for the Shree Ayyappa Kshetram is planned for early 2008.

A Hexagon On Saturn

NASA'S CASSINI ORBITER cameras have captured images of a mysterious giant hexagon above Saturn's north pole. Spanning 15,500 miles—equivalent to the width of two planet Earths—the bizarre geometric feature appears to remain virtually still in the atmosphere as clouds swirl around it. The infra-red images show that the hexagon—which contains a smaller six-sided

formation—extends about 40 miles down into the clouds. The six-sided shape is in stark contrast to the swirling, hurricane-like vortex at Saturn's opposite pole. Kevin Baines of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, said: "This is a very strange feature, lying in a precise geometric fashion with six nearly equally straight sides. We've never seen anything like this on any other planet. Indeed, Saturn's thick atmosphere, where circularly-shaped waves and convective cells dominate, is perhaps the last place you'd expect to see such a six-sided geometric figure, yet there it is."



Sani's mystery: The hexagon above the north pole of Saturn

BRIEFLY...

PRIESTS ARE ADMINISTERING polio drops to children in the state of Bihar, India, where new cases of polio are being reported. "We are keen to wipe out polio, and we thought involving temple priests would be a good idea, as people trust and listen to them," said Gopal Krishna, a senior Bihar health official.

THE US IMMIGRATION SERVICE is proposing changes to the R-1 religious worker visa which make it more difficult to bring

religious workers to the country. See www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/2007/4/21.shtml#1.

A FINE NEW HINDU TEMPLE opened in Florida in March. Jacksonville's first Hindu temple, it will serve a congregation of 4,000 Hindus in the area.

AFRICAN RIOTERS IN UGANDA targeted Indians in April in Uganda, stoning one man to death after an Indian firm, the Mehta Group, revealed a gov-

ernment-approved proposal to slash 17,000 acres of the Mabira rainforest preserves to expand sugar cane plantations.

KASHMIR'S 700-YEAR-OLD Mangleshwar Siva Temple at Baba Demb was reopened after 18 years of closure. The event was the culmination of joint efforts between Pandits and Muslims in the area.

SWAMI GOKULANANDAJI, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, attained Mahasamadhi on the morning of March 31, 2007. He was 79. Long-time head of the

percent of 13- to 15-year-old females are vegetarian. Among those over 18, 2.3 percent say they never eat meat. By the end of 2007 the number of vegetarians in the US will top 7 million.

Whether the reason is compassion for animals, awareness of the health dangers of meat eating or concern about the ecological impact of meat rearing, kids are in the know, and stand their ground in debates with mom and friends. It's also "totally cool" to be a veggie.

Parents are learning to cope. Professionals advise: Make sure your child gets her protein and calcium, keep the quantity of fat intake down, and your child will be just fine. Remember, a bad diet is a bad diet, whether it is burgers and fries or veggie pizza, potato chips and salad drenched in saturated fatty dressings.

New Delhi RK Mission Center, he was a much beloved and widely respected spiritual leader throughout India.

THE ISO 9001:2000 CERTIFICATE was awarded to Malaysia's 100-year-old Sundararaja Perumal Temple in Klang, Malaysia, in recognition of quality of its religious, cultural and social services.

VENTRIA BIOSCIENCE, a California-based firm has received preliminary approval from the USDA to begin cultivation of rice containing human genes.



An aware generation: More and younger children are refusing meat

USA

"No Meat for Me, Dad"

DEAN WINTERS TOLD HIS family when he was just six that he did not want to eat meat: "I love animals a whole lot, and I really don't care for meat that much." His father, Harold, said, "At first, I kind of fought it and tried to get him to eat meat. But he was pretty solid about his convictions." Now, when mom and dad eat steak, Dean is served a protein substitute.

In its 2005 poll of young people, the Vegetarian Resource Group (www.vrg.org) in Baltimore reported that 3 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds are vegetarian (that is, they do not eat meat, poultry or fish/seafood.) Eleven



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others.

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IN MY OPINION

Respecting our Wise Men

India's village pandits deserve our highest esteem rather than the typical, unwarranted criticism

BY HARI CHAND SHARMA

ALTHOUGH I HAVE LIVED AWAY FROM my home in rural Himachal Pradesh for 30 years, I have returned frequently for visits. On these trips I have worked with at least a dozen pandits who performed religious ceremonies at our home and the homes of other relatives or villagers. I found them very sweet, cordial and accessible, deserving praise and higher wages and certainly not criticism.

I feel that there is much unfair criticism of pandits for accepting money for their services, among many other issues. I have attended *kirtans* where the musicians insulted the pandits for being hungry for money—but at the end of the session, those same men kept their eyes intently on the harmonium where people offered them money.

With little experience outside their own villages, people think that only their own local priests take money for religious services. Salaried officials take bribes and shirk work. We pay a fee toward teachers' salaries and pensions. The benefit of going to school goes to the student, and that of a religious ceremony to the host. Pandits, too, have their families to support; yet it is the pandit—who typically does not even contract how much he will be paid, but rather helps villagers unconditionally—who is insulted for accepting his genuine, charitable income.

India lives in her villages, and pandits epitomize the ideals of village culture. Villagers know their pandit from his childhood. He has served as a model human to earn his honored position. The consistency in his character and behavior is awe-inspiring. Throughout the functions I've attended in homes, if anyone became angry, the pandit remained calm. His tolerance disseminates among villagers. His sermons and advice help keep stress and tension under control, cultivating a sense of brotherhood and ameliorating potential burdens on law enforcement. His presence is a strong deterrent against drinking in the villages.

The pandit's arrival at a home models religious discipline. Children observe how the pandit removes his shoes, washes his hands, chants the mantra *Aum*. His words

of spirituality and his bhajans are practical. Hearing a pandit chant Sanskrit by rote, schoolchildren are encouraged to memorize their lessons.

Besides Vedic prayers for peace, progeny and prosperity, a pandit helps villagers by performing house blessings, weddings and death ceremonies. He speaks respectfully as he walks through a village. If someone touches his feet or greets him, he responds reverentially. He performs pujas in villagers' homes for the benefit of the elderly who can't travel to distant temples.

By talking to a pandit, village folk are able to spiritualize their problems. He draws from ancient scriptures and great epics to encourage them. He freely sits in shops and homes to answer their questions and gives time for them to seek his advice. He quietly leaves if the talk turns to violence, meat, liquor, adultery, theft or inappropriate jokes.

Pandits are instrumental in arranging marriages between boys and girls of different villages. I witnessed one marriage that occurred even after the pandit who was consulted counseled against it upon seeing the horoscopes of the boy and girl. It was a failure from day one. Perhaps if pandits are sidelined, more marriages will be in trouble.

I have never seen a pandit terminate a ceremony and go home murmuring for want of money. Though they have known that I'm a nonresident Indian, not one has ever asked for any especially high donations. Most of them did not even look at what was offered, but continued with the mantras. It would be interesting to calculate the total expense of a wedding and the proportion paid to the priest—yet when our daughter was married, instead of taking the grains that were offered, the priest requested that we donate them to a kitchen for orphans.

I have found India's village pandits simple, sharing and caring. We must learn to appreciate our priests and treat them with respect, to strengthen them, not weaken them.

HARI CHAND SHARMA lives in Indiana. He has a Ph.D. in genetics and is a retired professor of agronomy at Purdue University.

Planning: the Key to Success

When problems arise, rather than restructuring your buildings, look to your business and family planning

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A NEW TREND IN HINDU COMMUNITIES around the world is the widespread, one could even say faddish, application of the principles of the ancient Hindu science of *vastu* to the design of businesses and homes. *Vastu* has always been used in the construction of Hindu temples and in village home design. In theory, the widened use of *vastu* in the Hindu community and beyond is a positive development.

Vastu unfolds the scientific principles and models of spiritual art and architecture to yield a harmonious flow of energy in the physical environment, giving rise to good health, wealth, intelligence, happiness and attunement with the wider universe.

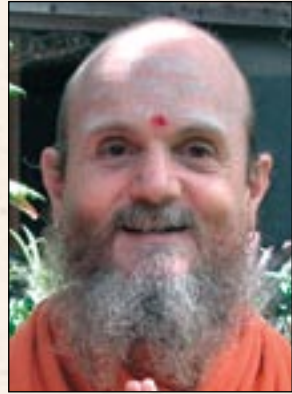
Renowned Indian architect and *Vastu Shastra* expert Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati explains: "In literal terms, *vastu* means 'to dwell' or 'to exist' and *shastra* means science. The main aim of *vastu* science is to create building spaces to live in harmony with subtle nature."

Following *vastu* principles of design can certainly make businesses more successful and homes more harmonious. However, the problematic trend is to emphasize it above all else—thinking that the sole cause of obstacles and lack of success is the flawed layout of one's home or office. For example, the sales of a business drop precipitously, and a *vastu* expert is consulted. He asserts that the cause is the poor layout of the space and advises: "Rebuild the structure according to my *vastu* design and your problems will quickly disappear!"

We know of many Hindus who received such advice over the last few years, some who inadvisedly spent large sums of money taking down and rebuilding parts of their home or office—or moving to a new location—in anticipation that this would solve all their problems. The truth is that in most cases it did not.

Designing one's home and business spaces according to *vastu* principles is an excellent goal. When asked, we encourage Hindus to have their new home or business designed in this way. The traditional, all-granite hand-carved Iraivan Temple we are building here in Hawaii follows the guidelines of *vastu* as interpreted by Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati, whom we quoted above. Regarding *vastu* remodeling, he observes, "Modifications of a building lead to a disturbance of energy inside the enclosed space. Hence the *shastras* do not recommend any post-construction alterations.... As our modern age has created a lifestyle crisis, many architects and designers are now turning to the ancient traditions of *vastu* for inspiration. Sadly, this has led to a lot of exploitation and misinterpretation."

Common sense tells us that there are many causes for not being successful. In my experience, the most common one is lack of proper planning. In the words of French author and aviator



Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Planning in Business

Let me share a story. A young couple who had pilgrimaged to our Kauai monastery told me of their ambition to give up their current employment and open an ice cream shop in Florida. I encouraged them to develop a solid business plan before starting and suggested working with their local Small Business Administration (SBA), a government agency that gives sound advice to small businesses for free. They

opened the shop soon after but never took the time to develop a business plan. A few months later they e-mailed me lamenting that the new business was not doing well. Little wonder, I thought.

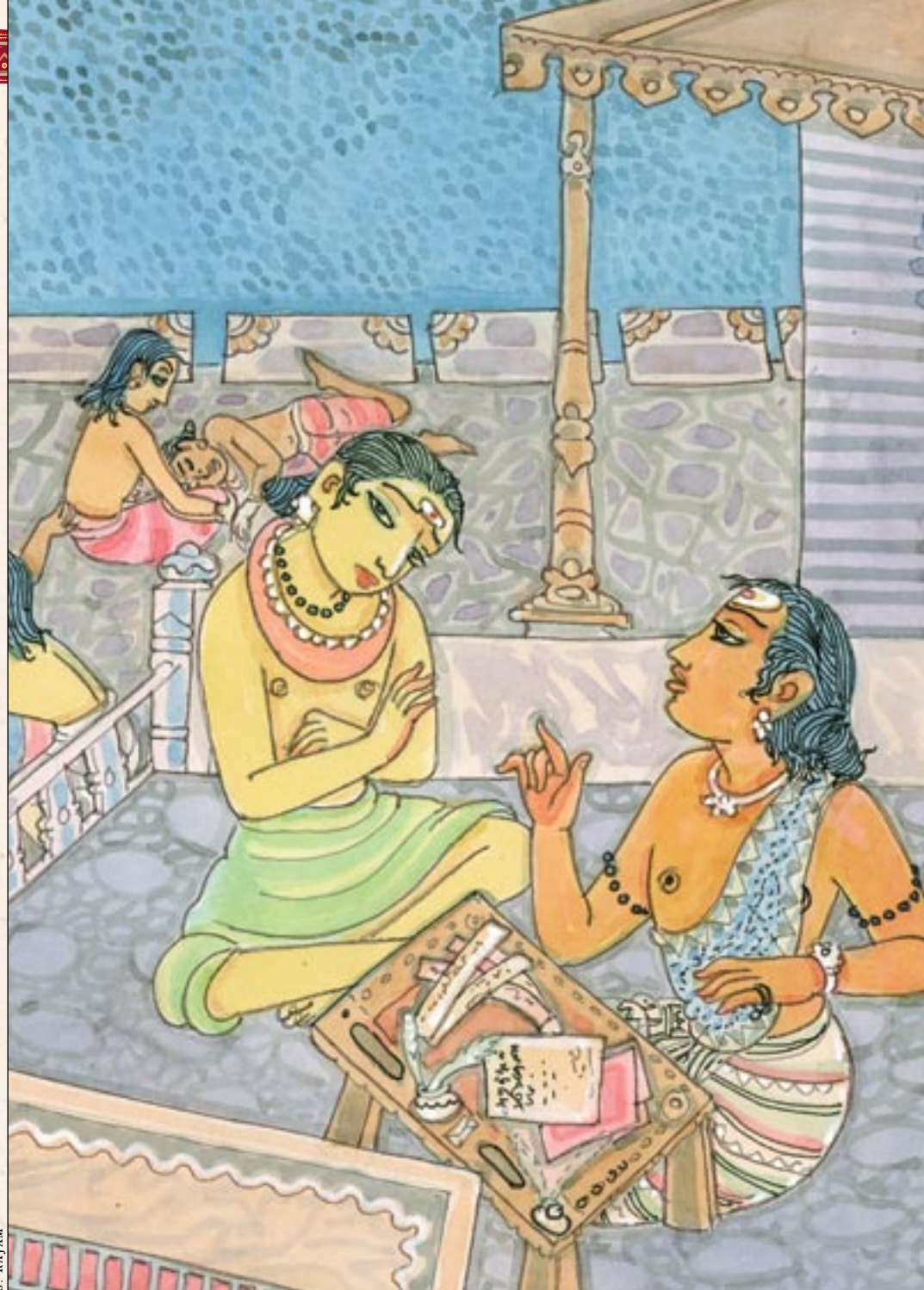
My guru strongly counseled devotees on the importance of planning. He wrote a sutra expressing the relationship of planning to success: "Siva's devotees approach each enterprise with deliberate thoughtfulness, and act only after careful consideration. They succeed in every undertaking by having a clear purpose, a wise plan, persistence and push."

The quality and comprehensiveness of our plan is a major factor in our ultimate success. Thus it is wise to draw on all the planning resources available to us. There are many good books and software programs on business planning. However, it is essential to also seek out first-hand advice from experts in the field. Ask them key questions about the opportunities and challenges. In large ventures, it is advisable to hire a professional consultant. Creating a plan when starting a business is crucial. That plan must then be updated every few years to keep up with our rapidly changing world.

Once your plan is complete, inaugurate it through prayer. Go to the temple on an auspicious day and worship Lord Ganesha through attending puja, having an *archana* or a special *abhishekam* or *homa* beseeching His blessings for a grand success.

Personal and Family Planning

Of course, the benefits of planning are not limited to the business or financial side of life. Personal life can also benefit, for a plan keeps us focused and motivated toward specific goals in life's various departments. Though the connection may not be imme-



Don't blame the building: This businessman is being warned that recent downturns in his company can be traced to the inauspicious engineering of his office, there in the background, which should be rebuilt to assure success. He explains his own solution, exhibiting his detailed business plan for a better future.

the strategy to accomplish them, including financial considerations.

A business develops goals for its various departments, such as production, sales, marketing and finance. For our personal plan, it is useful to divide life into its major departments. My guru designated a five-fold division that encompasses all aspects of life—spiritual, social, cultural, economic and educational—to which we have added a sixth: physiological.

Our first step is to list our goals or objectives in each of the six areas. Ask six questions and write down the answers to each. What are the family's (or individual's): 1) spiritual goals? 2) social goals? 3) cultural goals? 4) economic goals? 5) educational goals? 6) physical and health goals?

As you begin this process, the question will sooner or later arise of how many years ahead to plan: one, two, three, six, ten? Gurudeva recommended a six-year time frame as ideal, then each year adding one more year to the plan to keep it always six years into the future. However, if six years seems a bit daunting at first, a good minimum period to start with is three years. Here are some sample goals in each area.

Spiritual: Yearly pilgrimage to a temple or holy place, even if it's just a few hundred miles away. For example, Singapore devotees enjoy group pilgrimages to temples in neighboring Malaysia.

Social: Extended-family gatherings. Special family outings. When is the last time your family went horseback riding?

Cultural: Children taking dance and music lessons. Attending cultural performances as a family. Adults taking time to paint, play music and sing.

Economic: Saving for the children's education. Saving for retirement.

Educational: Children's secular education. Adults acquiring new skills. Training to advance career. Learning about herbs, healing, making preserves; arts and crafts.

Physiological: All health goals, diets, *pancha karma* and other therapies and fasting regimens, exercise and care of one's physical environment, including clothing and hobbies, can be included in this category.

As with a business plan, it is necessary to revise your personal plan periodically to adjust to major changes

in circumstances, such as moving to a new community, job change, retirement, caring for an elderly parent, children leaving home when they marry or go off to college, large inheritances, and severe illness or accident.

When challenges arise, it is important to act swiftly, tactically and responsibly to find the cause and apply the proper remedy. Don't listen to those who would solve your problems, and build their own business, by rebuilding or rearranging your house or offices. It's not, in my experience, an effective solution. Work instead on your plan. Who knows, you may become so successful that, as your plan manifests your aspirations, five years from now you can put up a new building designed according to the venerable wisdom of *vastu*!

LETTERS

Hindu History Lesson

HINDUISM TODAY'S 16-PAGE HINDU HISTORY lesson ("Hinduism from Ancient Times," Apr/May/Jun, 2007) is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. The HINDUISM TODAY editorial staff deserves our sincere appreciation and gratitude for producing this positive and constructive account for sixth grade students anywhere in the world. In fact, if each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society. The crucial problem with Hindus has been our inability to succinctly describe Hinduism as a whole, or even to briefly explain it properly. HINDUISM TODAY's narrative will go a long way in redressing this prevailing disability. I endorse it wholeheartedly and without reservations. It should be required reading for every Hindu.

SHIVA G. BAJPAI, PH.D.
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ASIAN
STUDIES, CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE, CA, USA
✉ HCCHIS006@CSUN.EDU

COMING FROM AN ORGANIZATION WHICH practices, teaches and spreads the message of the most ancient but most adoptive Hindu faith, naturally this lesson is well written, factual and clear in presentation for pre-teens to understand, learn and enjoy. Reading this material not only makes any Hindu child proud of his/her heritage, but it also gives the right facts on one of the major religions in the world. I strongly recommend "Hinduism from Ancient Times" as teaching material on Hinduism for ten-year-olds in schools in all states.

G.V. RAGHU, M.D.
PRESIDENT, CHINMAYA MISSION OF ATLANTA;
FORMER CHAIRMAN, EDUCATION COMMITTEE,
HINDU TEMPLE OF ATLANTA, GA, USA

THIS IS A VERY CLEAR INTRODUCTION TO Hinduism. It is in line with the requirements of a history lesson and yet manages to put across some of the more subtle ideas inherent in Hinduism in an eloquent and effective manner. The lesson allows us to picture life in ancient times and manages to interweave history with the key beliefs and practices of Hinduism. The correct historic perspective on the development of Hinduism is useful, as it allows Hinduism to take a lead role in directing how spirituality unfolds on the contemporary scene. Congratulations for publishing such a wonderful article to address the needs of Hindu youth in the West.

JAY LAKHANI
VIVEKANANDA CENTRE, LONDON, UK

THE SUPPLEMENT PREPARED BY HINDUISM TODAY for sixth grade students is a most valuable and worthwhile publication. It provides a simple and concise summary of Hinduism that is both correct and authentic. It is definitely better than any sixth grade school textbook portrayal of Hinduism currently in use in the USA.

VED PRAKASH CHAUDHARY, PH.D.
PRESIDENT, EDUCATORS SOCIETY FOR THE
HERITAGE OF INDIA, MORGANVILLE, NJ, USA

FOR TOO LONG, SCHOOL CHILDREN BEGINNING their first encounter with the most ancient of living religious traditions in the world have been subjected to inaccurate, incomplete and simplistic depictions of Hinduism. Presenting Hinduism from the perspective of its practitioners to those who are being introduced to it for the first time seems a simple enough concept. Yet, too many Hindu children to date have faced a perplexing disconnect as the religion they read about in school bears no resemblance to that which they practice at home. In contrast, Christian, Jewish and Muslim children do not face such a lack of association about their faith. With this document, the publishers of HINDUISM TODAY fill a critical void in the educational syllabus for Hindu and non-Hindu students alike. HINDUISM TODAY is recognized globally as the premier periodical documenting the experience of the Hindu community worldwide. Celebrated for its commitment to accuracy and professionalism, HINDUISM TODAY has once again applied its high standards of rigorous editing and artistry to this latest production. While no document can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that "Hinduism from Ancient Times" compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION
KENSINGTON, MD, USA

ON BEHALF OF THE HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK Sangh (HSS), I express our heartfelt congratulations and deep gratitude to the entire staff of HINDUISM TODAY for the Hindu history lesson. Your "response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books" is timely and compelling, and you have articulated the message so thoughtfully and eloquently. On difficult or controversial issues, such as the Aryan invasion theory, your simple statement that "all the evidence for it is questionable," says it all so effectively. The lesson provides an exemplary guide to the student to understand Hindu beliefs and scriptures and to appreciate what Hinduism

in practice really means. It is indeed a significant contribution to creating awareness of Hinduism here in the West. Thank you for all that you do to spread Hindu wisdom.

DR. VED NANDA
PRESIDENT, HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH; VICE
PROVOST, UNIVERSITY OF DENVER, CO, USA

HINDUISM TODAY HAS PERFORMED AN important public service by providing a clear and accessible text which presents Hinduism from a Hindu perspective. This presentation provides a needed counter-balance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus, and which emphasize negatives such as untouchability, a practice to which many Hindus object. And yet it does so in a way which does not whitewash or ignore the problematic nature of caste. The particular strength of HINDUISM TODAY's presentation is that not only does it not give a monolithic depiction of Hinduism, it distinguishes among the various Hindu traditions—Vaishnava, Saiva, Shakta and Smarta—with a degree of detail not typically found in basic introductions to Hinduism.

Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending these sections as review material for my college students. The section on the origins of Hinduism is likely to be the most controversial, given the ongoing debates about the Aryan migration theory. But I like the way this presentation emphasizes areas in which our knowledge is still lacking, rather than strongly affirming a counter-theory of indigenous Aryan origins as a Hindu nationalist history would do. All in all, excellent work! I am happy to endorse this presentation of Hinduism.

JEFFERY D. LONG, PH.D.
CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS
STUDIES, ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE,
ELIZABETHTOWN, PA, USA

WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO HINDUISM TODAY for its extraordinary work in presenting Hinduism in its appropriate historical light, with tangible facts gleaned from Hindu experts and scholars to support and broadcast the intrinsic values of the Hindu tradition.

It is distressing to see Hinduism's vast history belittled and whittled down by the hands of those whose personal agendas are ambitious and prejudiced, evidenced by the inured spate of fictitious theories, such as the Aryan Invasion/Migration theory once more being resurrected by Western Indologists, Christian theologians and academicians. Unlike any other spiritual tradition in America, with the inalienable right to have their culture portrayed accurately, Hindu academi-

cians and scholars are given far less berth to rectify erroneous information about their culture. It is a breath of fresh air to see this ancient culture of harmony and nonviolence portrayed in accurate light, rather than witness more of the general bias perpetrated for too many centuries against it.

As we begin to address the disparaging light to which Hinduism is subjected by the many misinformed and misguided, we must all take part in undoing, rectifying and healing the crimes of the past. Specifically, let us not turn our backs on the humongous dilemma now pandemic within Hindu culture: the caste system. Apparently, this system is securely tied to the intricately engineered political missile programmed to perennially generate and inflict hurt, damage and destruction on Hinduism.

Factions against Hinduism can be found in many shapes and forms: among India's politicians and religious leaders, European historians and "experts" (who write their own version of Hinduism's history), and Western Indologists and academicians—all motivated by one or the other ingredient of the illusory mix of power, fame, wealth, race and prejudice.

Whatever is the motivation for the ongoing epidemic of misinformation, we have got to dig deep within ourselves to find the collective solution. To do so, we must come to terms with the most pertinent question of our time: How did Hinduism come to find itself mired in the irreverent and inhumane state that is the caste system?

The greatest contributor to the hurt and confusion within Hinduism is the perversion of its harmonious community concept of varnas, which refers to our inner divinity, the light of consciousness. A primary meaning of the word *varna* is "luster; light of dawn," which reveals the core intention of the varna community constitution that has been erroneously and deviously retooled as the "caste system." This retooling was deliberately performed by the endless foreign invaders and incursions upon the body and spirit of Hinduism. These incursions served to seal the fate of the perverted caste system within India. But as the Hindu people know, the karma of fate is never sealed. In this case, it can and must be changed.

SRI SWAMINI MAYATTITANANDA
SPIRITUAL HEAD, WISE EARTH MONASTERY
CANDLER, NC, USA

THE LESSON ON HINDUISM PRESENTS A lucid, authentic and easily-understandable picture of Hindu history, tradition and practices. I hear so many complaints from Hindu parents and students in the USA and Europe regarding the incorrect, and even frequently demeaning, presentation of Hinduism in world religions classes. It is time that the educational boards and text-

book publishers take a sincere interest in presenting Hinduism in a factual manner. This is the most comprehensive summary of Hinduism's multi-faceted tradition that I have seen to date. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks for students.

SWAMI CHIDANAND SARASWATI
FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, INDIA HERITAGE
RESEARCH FOUNDATION, RISHIKESH, INDIA

I HAVE BEEN AWARE FOR SOME YEARS of the poor presentation of Hinduism in our public schools. Both parents and children have complained to me about it. The Hindu religion is inadequately explained, and in unflattering terms in the elementary and middle school social studies and history books. In many places, we notice mutilation of facts about Hinduism, and often these are getting quoted. I congratulate HINDUISM TODAY for addressing this situation with its sixth-grade history lesson in Hinduism. This lesson corrects many of the errors in the current chapters on Hinduism, presents the religion in a sympathetic light and describes the religion in the way Hindus understand and practice it. The lesson is a commendable attempt to produce a simple history of Hinduism that is acceptable to nearly all in our religion.

C.K. HIRANYA GOWDA, M.D.
FORMER PRESIDENT, HINDU TEMPLE
OF NASHVILLE, TN, USA

Greatness of Hinduism

THANK YOU FOR GURUDEVA'S MOST profound and enlightening article ("Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). I was not only moved by his home truths, but his divine greatness is apparent in the lofty philosophy which leaves Sanatana Dharma without any peer and, I must add, the only true living religion that will survive for all time. I am also mindful of the oft quoted saying, "What you cannot find in Hinduism, you will find nowhere else." The quest for a perfect life for every Hindu is intrinsically interwoven in the law of karma, which can be easily interpreted in the quotation, "All the good deeds of a lifetime are washed away in the flood caused by a single sin." The relentless pursuit to transform into the most perfect and eventually liberated soul harkens every Hindu on his spiritual journey back to God.

LOGGIENATHAN NAIDOO
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An Eye for an Eye

I SAW THE PHRASE "AN EYE FOR AN EYE" used in the Letters section and "Hinduism and Modern Life" in the Apr/May/Jun, 2007, issue. I am a Jewish woman who regularly reads and enjoys your magazine, and I would like to give your readers some back-

ground on that often misused and misunderstood phrase. It comes from the Jewish *Torah*, which is also the first five books of the Christian *Bible*, specifically from three different places: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. This phrase does not mean that one should exact revenge for a wrong. It does mean that restitution should be just and fair. If someone causes another person harm, be it physical or monetary, he should only be responsible for returning the value of what was harmed. Prior to this concept, a man might take another man's life as revenge for a broken arm, for example. Justice is very important in the Jewish faith. The concept of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" was designed to protect both the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong.

JENNIFER PLUNK
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Corrections

✓ In *Diaspora, "Wiccan Wife Wins Cause,"* Apr/May/Jun, 2007, it was indicated that officials approved the pentacle's placement on Sgt. Stewart's grave marker after his wife threatened a lawsuit. The grave marker in fact does display the Wiccan pentacle, but its presence is due to the memorial site's being state-owned, not under the authority of the VA, and Nevada's having deemed the pentacle an acceptable faith symbol. Additionally, in a settlement with Americans United for Separation of Church and State on April 23, 2007, the VA finally approved the Wiccan pentacle symbol for deceased veterans' grave markers in VA cemeteries.

✓ In "Canada's Hindu Youth," Apr/May/Jun, 2007, the interviewees are from the Hindu Temple in Richmond Hill, not the Varasiddhi Vinayagar Temple; the correct website address is www.thehindutemple.ca; the photo of Sivakami Loganathan appears on page 53, not page 61, and the musical teacher's name is Bhuma Krishnan, not Uma Krishnan.

✓ The number of saints who authored the *Panniru-Thirumurai* is given as 64 in "In Praise of Siva's Singers," Apr/May/Jun, 2007. The correct number is 27. Photos in the article are by the author, Anantha Krishnan.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or e-mailed to: letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

✉ INDICATES LETTERS RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

QUOTES & QUIPS

You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, be they human, animal or any living thing.

Sukla Yajur Veda, 12.32

You are here to eat mangoes; not to count the number of leaves in the mango tree. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886), *guru of Swami Vivekananda*

The intellect in its capacity to contain Truth is a very limited tool, while faith is very broad, accommodating and embracing faculty. The mystery of life and beyond life, of Siva, is really better understood through faith than through intellectual understanding. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

It is not in books, you fool. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872-1964), *Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master*

Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh, and the greatness which does not bow before children. **Kahlil Gibran** (1883-1931), *mystic, poet and artist*

Meet life as it comes, with or without the things that your mind is demanding from it. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916-1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Respect, don't suspect. **Swami Tejoma-yananda**, *head of Chinmaya Mission*

The best way to cheer yourself up: Cheer everybody else up. **Mark Twain** (1835-1910), *American author*

Here is a test to find out whether your mission in life is complete. If you're alive, it isn't. **Richard Bach**, *American writer*

Happiness eludes us if we run after it. In fact, happiness comes only from within. It is not a commodity to be bought from outside. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

It is not surprising that we keep looking for love, because we are all born of love. We come out of love. All of us are nothing

but vibrations of love. We are sustained by love, and in the end we merge back into love. **Baba Muktananda** (1908-1982)

I don't have a problem with willpower. It's won't power I have a problem with.

Go beyond science, into the region of metaphysics. Real religion is beyond argument. It can only be lived, both inwardly and outwardly. **Swami Sivananda** (1887-1963), *founder of the Divine Life Society*

The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him—that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902)

You are the only person on this earth who can use your ability.

The *Vedas* are not only true, but they contain all truth, including the ideas of modern science. **Swami Dayananda Saraswati** (1825-1883), *Hindu reformer*

One must seek the shortest way and the fastest means to get back home—to turn the spark within into a blaze, to be merged in and to identify with that greater fire which ignited the spark. **Swami Nityananda of Ganeshpuri** (1885-1961), *South Indian Mystic*

If you lose all differentiation between yourselves and others, fit to serve others you will be. **Milarepa** (1052-1135), *Buddhist saint*

We do not know the various kinds of saints, how they behave, what they do and eat, etc. We only know that by God's grace they manifest themselves in this

Frank and Ernest

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world to liberate the ignorant and bound souls. **Shirdi Sai Baba** (1838-1915)

All this universe is in the glory of God, of Siva, the God of love. The heads and faces of men are His own, and He is in the hearts of all. **Krishna Yajur Veda**, *Svetasvatara Upanishad* 3.11

Help wanted: Psychic. You know where to apply.

One must be patient like the Earth. What iniquities are being perpetuated on her! Yet she quietly endures them all. **Mother Sarada Devi** (1853-1920)

Enquire: 'Who am I?' and you will find the answer. Look at a tree: from one seed arises a huge tree; from it comes numerous seeds, each one of which in its turn grows into a tree. No two fruits

are alike. Yet it is one life that throbs in every particle of the tree. So, it is the same atman everywhere. **Sri Anandamayi Ma** (1896-1982), *Bengali mystic*

It is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in self-destruction of the human race. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together in to a single family. So now we turn to India: this spiritual gift, that makes a man human, is still alive in Indian souls. Go on giving it to the world. Nothing else can do so much to help mankind to save itself from destruction. **Dr. Arnold Joseph Toynbee** (1889-1975), *British historian*

Parents need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem and respect so high that the rest of the world can't poke enough holes to make it dry. **Alvin Price**, *American teacher*

The more we thank God for what we have, the more we have to thank God for.

The arrow that is shot should penetrate so deeply, that even the feathers do not show. Hug the body of the Lord so tightly that the bones must be crushed to a crumble. Weld to the divine until the very welding disappears. **Mahadeviyakha**, *12th Century South Indian saint*

Wanting to reform the world without discovering one's true self is like trying to cover the world with wool to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes. **Ramana Maharishi** (1879-1950), *South Indian mystic*

DID YOU KNOW?

India's Share of the World's People

FROM ANCIENT TIMES, ABOUT ONE-fifth of the world's people have lived in India. Today an unpartitioned India (i.e., plus Pakistan and Bangladesh) would still account for 22% of the world's population.



Year	India	World	Percent
2000 BCE	5	27	19%
500 BCE	25	100	25%
10	35	170	21%
500	50	190	26%
1000	79	265	30%
1500	105	425	25%
1700	165	610	27%
1900	290	1,600	18%
1992	895	5,300	17%
2007	1,125	6,585	17%

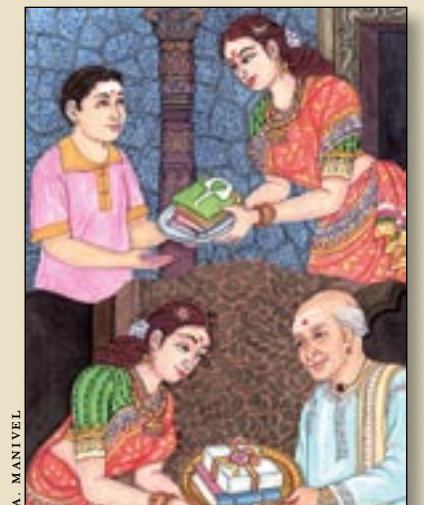
Source: *Atlas of World Population History*; 2007 from US Census Bureau

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Karma

KARMA LITERALLY MEANS "DEED" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The *Vedas* tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the

totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births.



Finally, a Fair and Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

A 16-page sixth-grade social studies lesson from the editors of Hinduism Today

Hinduism Today's 16-page Hindu history lesson is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Ph.D Director, Center for Asian Studies, California State University

This lesson corrects many of the errors in the current chapters on Hinduism, presents the religion in a sympathetic light and describes the religion in the way Hindus understand and practice it. The lesson is a commendable attempt that is acceptable to nearly all in our religion.

C.K. Hiranya Gowda, M.D., Former President, Hindu Temple of Nashville, TN, USA

While no document can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA



Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight in HINDUISM TODAY magazine's response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books. It is a 16-page lesson on Hindu history, beliefs and practices for sixth graders written from the Hindu point of view. It is historically sound and acceptable in content and tone to the various denominations of the Hindu community.

The problem with every existing textbook for this grade level is that Hinduism is presented negatively, incompletely and inaccurately. This lesson is patterned after a typical chapter on the Jewish faith in these same books. It deliberately does not follow the specific California standards for

presenting the Hindu religion because we believe them to be deeply flawed and contrary to the State's own general rule that teaching material must: 1) be historically accurate, 2) "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage" and 3) avoid "adverse reflection" on a religion. It is our intent that this lesson will serve as a model for US textbooks, providing an authentic depiction of the eminent history and traditions of the faith while giving 10-year-old Hindu students justifiable pride in their religion.

In most states teachers are allowed to supplement the textbooks with additional material. This lesson may be offered as a more accurate basis for the classroom study of the origins and development of Hinduism in ancient India.

This is the most comprehensive summary of Hinduism's multi-faceted tradition that I have seen to date. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks for students.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Founder & Chairman, India Heritage Research Foundation, Rishikesh

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending these sections as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA

FROM THE VEDAS

Hinduism's Restraints and Observances

Sandilya Upanishad expounds upon the twenty *yamas* and *niyamas*

SANDILYA IS THE 103RD OF THE 108 UPANISHADS AND IS attached to the Atharva Veda. It is part of a set of scriptures called the Yoga Upanishads which deal mostly with ashtanga, or eight-limbed, yoga. This excerpt from chapter one is important for its listing of the ten yamas and ten niyamas. These restraints and observances constitute the first two of the eight limbs of classical yoga—establishing a foundation of good conduct and piety so that hatha yoga and meditation can be successful.

Om! O Devas, may we hear with our ears what is auspicious, may we see with our eyes what is auspicious, O ye worthy of worship! May we enjoy the term of life allotted by the Devas, praising them with our body and limbs steady! May the glorious Indra bless us! May the all-knowing Sun bless us! May Garuda, the thunderbolt for evil, bless us! May Brihaspati grant us well-being! Om! Let there be Peace in me! Let there be Peace in my environment! Let there be Peace in the forces that act on me!

Sage Sandilya questioned Atharvan thus: "Please tell me about the eight *angas* (parts or limbs) of yoga which are the means of attaining to Atman."

Atharvan replied: "The eight *angas* of yoga are *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. Of these, *yama* (restraints) is of ten kinds; and so is *niyama* (observances). There are eight *asanas* (yoga postures). *Pranayama* (breath control) is of three kinds; *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal) is of five kinds; so also is *dharana* (concentration). *Dhyana* (contemplation) is of two kinds and *samadhi* (Realization) is of one kind only.

"Under *yama* are ten: *ahimsa*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, *daya*, *arjava*, *kshama*, *dhriti*, *mitahara* and *saucha*. Of these, *ahimsa* is the not causing of any pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body. *Satya* is the speaking of the truth that conduces to the well-being of creatures, through the actions of one's mind, speech, or body. *Asteya* is not coveting of another's property through the actions of one's mind, speech or body. *Brahmacharya* is the refraining from sexual intercourse in all places and in all states in mind, speech or body. *Daya* is kindness towards all creatures in all places. *Arjava* is the preserving of equanimity of mind, speech or body in the performance (or non-performance) of the actions ordained (or forbidden) to be done. *Kshama* is the bearing patiently of all pleasant or unpleasant things, such as praise or physical aggression. *Dhriti* is the preserving of firmness of mind during the period of gain or loss of wealth or relatives. *Mitahara* is the taking of nutritious food, leaving one-fourth of the stomach empty. *Saucha* is of two kinds, external and internal. Of these, the external is the cleansing of the body by earth and water; the internal is the cleansing of the mind. This (i.e., internal cleansing) is to be attained by means of the *Adhyatma-Vidya* (Science of Self).

"Under *niyama* (religious observances), are ten: *tapas*, *santosha*, *astikya*, *dana*, *ishvarapujana*, *siddhanta-shravana*, *hri*, *mati*, *japa* and *vrata*. Of these, *tapas* is the emancipation of the body through observance of such penances as *krichchhra*, *chandrayana* (both are types of fasts), etc., according to rules. *Santosha* is being satisfied with whatever comes to us of its own accord. *Astikya* is the belief in the merits or demerits of actions as stated in the *Vedas*. *Dana* is the faithful giving to deserving persons of lawfully earned money, grains,

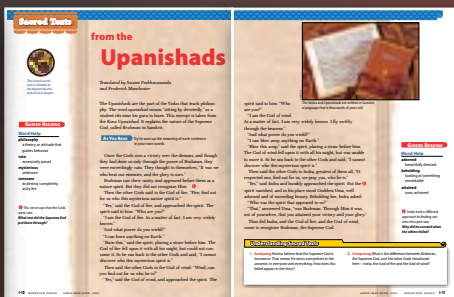
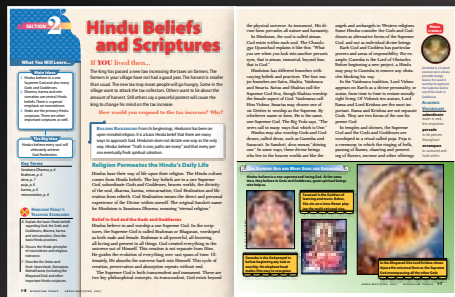
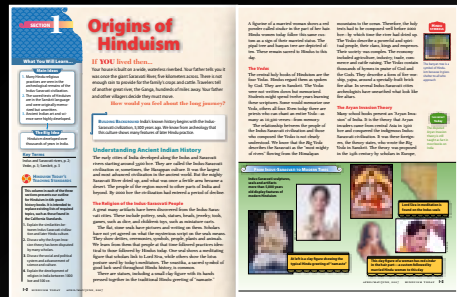


Key disciplines: Three of the ten *niyamas*, or religious observances: worship of God; scriptural study and *japa*

etc. *Ishvarapujana* is the worshiping of Vishnu, Rudra, etc., with pure mind according to one's ability. *Siddhanta-shravana* is the inquiry into the significance of Vedanta. *Hri* is being ashamed if one's behavior violates the rules of the *Vedas* and of society. *Mati* is faith in the paths laid down by the *Vedas*. *Japa* is the practicing of the mantras into which one is duly initiated by his spiritual instructor and which is not against (the rules of) the *Vedas*. It is of two kinds—the spoken and the mental. The mental is associated with contemplation by the mind. The spoken is of two kinds—the loud and the low. The loud pronunciation gives the reward as stated in the *Vedas*, while the low one gives a reward thousand times that. The mental gives a reward ten millions times that. *Vrata* is the regular observance of (or refraining from) the actions enjoined (or prohibited) by the *Vedas*.

K. NARAYANASVAMI AIYAR published this translation of Sandilya Upanishad (slightly edited here) in 1914 along with the Adyar Library as part of his book, Thirty Minor Upanishads. The translations had previously appeared in the monthly journal, The Theosophist. He collaborated in the work with Sundara Sastri.

The *Vedas* are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, *shruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the *Torah* (1,200 BCE), *Bible New Testament* (100 CE), *Koran* (630 CE) or *Zend Avesta* (600 BCE). Four in number, *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*, the *Vedas* include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 BCE.



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Malaysia's Festive Jewel

Downtown K.L.: At just past midnight on February 1, the 21-foot tall, 20-ton silver-clad chariot began its 13 kilometer journey from the Maha Mariamman temple in downtown Kuala Lumpur to Batu Caves Murugan Temple

SPECIAL FEATURE

One million devotees celebrate Thai Pusam Murugan festival

MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION OF KUALA Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, turn out to honor the day when Lord Murugan received the holy *vel*, or spear of wisdom and power, from His Mother, Goddess Parvati. The festival is observed with deep

reverence by Tamil Hindus around the world, but in Malaysia, North Indians, Sikhs and Chinese Buddhists join in. Our story covers the celebrations at Batu Caves Murugan Temple outside Kuala Lumpur which was attended this year by an estimated 1.3 million people.



Our correspondent, Rajiv Malik of Delhi, arrived in Malaysia on January 26, a week before the official beginning of Thai Pusam on February 1 and stayed on for one week afterward. He attended the festival and interviewed organizers, participants and prominent Hindus. An key resource for this story was the unpublished thesis on the festival by Dr. Carl Vadivel Belle of Australia, who participates each year by carrying a large kavadi. See URL at end of story to access a short video documentary produced by Hinduism Today to accompany this article.

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

BATU CAVES WAS ALREADY SWARMING with devotees four days before Thai Pusam officially began. As we approached the area, I was awestruck by the majestic 142-foot golden statue of Lord Murugan [see inside cover of this issue]. Dedicated at last year's Thai Pusam, it has already gained international fame. The intricately detailed concrete statue with a 40-foot deep foundation, stands dominantly at the base of a limestone cliff. Behind it is the long, wide and steep staircase leading to a huge natural cave that houses a small temple to this beloved God. At the base are additional temples, permanent exhibit halls and—during the festival—a mini-city of religious shops, stalls for various organizations, music stores, free feeding venues and even an amusement fair, complete with Ferris wheels and other entertainment. Many devotees have come early to avoid the crush on Thai Pusam day, when over a million people will assemble in this compound. Devotees

of all ages climb the 272 steps chanting “Vel, Vel” and “Vetri Vel Murugan.” The Deity here is famous for granting devotees’ prayers for success in exams and business, healing and the conception of a long-desired baby.

The Festival and Its Devotees

Thai Pusam falls on the full moon day in the Tamil month of Thai (January/February) each year, when the moon moves through the zodiac period of Capricorn in the Indian calendar. It is on this day, according to some Hindu scriptures, that Goddess Parvati presented the holy *vel*, or spear, to Her Son, Lord Murugan (in other scriptures, the event took place at Skanda Shashti). Also known as Karttikeya and Subramaniam, Lord Murugan is greatly adored by Tamil Hindus around the world. In Malaysia, Fiji, South Africa and other countries with large Tamil communities, Thai Pusam is the festival of choice and is celebrated on a larger scale than in South India itself. Here in Malaysia, in addition to the million-plus who celebrate the festival at Batu Caves, hundreds of thousands more celebrate it across Malaysia, including crowds of 200,000 in Penang.

Prayers Answered

As I was taking in the sights and sounds, a man named Balbir Singh, recognizing my Punjabi dialect, greeted me as a brother. Our ancestors had come from the same area, which is now part of Pakistan. His grandfather had immigrated here from Punjab as part of the British Army. He said there are 100,000 Punjabis in Malaysia. “Thai Pusam is a great festival,” he exclaimed. “Hindus,

Christians and Sikhs, people of all communities, participate. My whole family came last year and offered milk to Lord Murugan for good academic results for my children. And they fared well as a result. Two years ago I had a bad dengue fever attack. I feared I was on my deathbed. My wife and daughter came here at 3 am on Thai Pusam, walked up the stairs and prayed for me. Lying in bed at the hospital, I also prayed to Lord Murugan for help. Suddenly, I realized that God was there. I quickly improved and was moved out of the critical care ward.” Stories such as his I would hear time and again.

Kavadi Worship

Some devotees carry *pal kudam* or *kavadi* up to the temple and offer it to Murugan—as penance, in fulfillment of a particular vow they have taken, or in petition for something they want to happen. One devotee carries *kavadi* to offset the bad things he has done during the year; another for success in exams; yet another for the trouble-free birth of his sister's baby. Most devotees, however, just come to Batu Caves to worship and do not perform these special observances.

Pal kudam, more common than *kavadi*, is a pot of milk carried on the head. *Kavadis* range from the simple *pal kavadi*—two pots of milk on a wooden pole surmounted by an arch—to extremely big, *alagu* (beautiful; ornate) *kavadis*. The latter is a sort of portable temple in which the Deity is supported over the devotee's head by an aluminum framework secured to a metal belt around his waist. Shoulder pads help ease the burden of the weight, which is sometimes con-

siderable. The structure is decorated with ribbons, flowers and peacock feathers. Such *kavadis* tower above the crowds as carriers make their way from the nearby riverbank up the steps to the temple. Of this year's 1.3 million worshippers, about 22,000 carried *kavadi* and *pal kudam*.

As a North Indian, I was not familiar with *kavadi* or *pal kudam*. In North India, *kavadis* are taken for Lord Siva to Neel Kanth Temple in Rishikesh, but those are simple compared to the works of art I saw here.

According to Carl Belle's thesis, the practice of *kavadi* is based on the story of Idumban. In the story, Lord Siva gave Sage Agasthya two Himalayan hills, Sivagiri and Saktigiri, requesting him to take them to South India. Agasthya enlisted the help of Idumban, a reformed asura (demon), for the task. Idumban made a shoulder sling from the staff of Lord Brahma and tied each hill to it with a divine serpent. This, Belle states, was the prototypical *kavadi*.

Idumban carried the hills to South India. When he reached the area of Palani Hills, he set the hills down to rest; but when he attempted to resume his journey, he could not lift the hills. A youth clad only in a loincloth, holding a staff and “shining like a thousand suns”—Lord Murugan, had claimed the hills for His own. Attempting to fight the youth, Idumban was killed, but was restored to life to serve as a guardian of Murugan's Palani Hills shrine. Today's devotees carry *kavadi* to place their psychic burdens at the feet of Murugan and obtain the kind of spiritual transformation that was bestowed upon Idumban.

The Chariot of Lord Murugan

(from upper left) The chariot with Murugan mounted inside passing through Kuala Lumpur at dawn, February 1; Chinese Buddhists and Hindus await the chariot with their offerings; the silver chariot is polished in the days before the festival; at every stop, babies are handed up for blessing before Murugan; despite the fact it is moving from midnight through the early morning hours, the streets are packed all along the way with people of all faiths waiting to greet the Deity



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ROHINI KUMAR NAIR



Penance and Austerity

Those carrying the big *kavadi* prepare for a full month, observing purification disciplines including eating only one meal a day. Those taking *pal kavadi* or *pal kudam* fast for a few days prior to the festival, as do many other worshipers. As added penance, carriers of *pal kudam*, *pal kavadi* or big *kavadi* may have a priest pierce their bodies with small spears, replicas of Lord Murugan's *vel*, for their climb from the river to the cave.

Body piercing—a distinctive feature of this festival—naturally attracts a lot of attention from the foreign press. Of the Thai Pusam photos taken by big news agencies, three-quarters are generally of devotees pierced with *vels* or hooks, and accounts rarely include any knowledgeable explanation of the practice. The rigorous preparation, devotion and serious intent of these *kavadi* carriers is all ignored, as is sincerity of the conclave of one million worshipers.

I am reminded of the Kumbha Mela, where foreign journalists obsess over the *naga babas*, naked sadhus—as if they were a carnival sideshow, oblivious to the discipline and asceticism they follow, enduring even the coldest season of North India unclad. And, like here, the press at the Mela is equally oblivious to the tens of millions of fully clad devotees who travel long distances to attend and worship with intense devotion.

Meeting the Temple President

I was able to interview Sri R. Nataraja, president of the Maha Mariamman Temple, which manages Batu Caves Temple. Now



Sri R. Nataraja

60, he has been associated with the temple—the largest in the country—since becoming secretary at age 22 and has served as president for 17 years. It was his idea to build the colossal Murugan statue, and he was instrumental in getting it funded. “Managing this festival is quite a challenge,” he observed. “We are trying to improve the crowd control, but every year there are more and more people. We have had to expedite the worship at the Cave Temple. You have seen at Tirupati, because of the huge number of devotees, they allow you to have darshan of the main Deity only while you are on the move. In past years we had trouble controlling those who wanted to bring big *kavadis* and pierce themselves with long *vels*. Once we became strict in enforcement, the devotees adjusted.”

“This is basically a religious festival,” he explained, “but we have to see that it has a commercial angle as well. All who attend also love to go to the marketplace to shop and to avail themselves of the free food distribution.”

Nataraja gave a brief summary of the festival's financial situation: “Out of the 1.3 million people who participated in Thai Pusam this year, 22,000 carried *kavadi* or *pal kudam* and 50,000 people had *archana* done in the main shrine. Only these 72,000 people paid money directly to the temple, for a total of about US\$235,000. The revenue from the temporary marketplace is far greater than that. The festival largely funds all our activities for the rest of the year.”

Preparing for Kavadi

In Kuala Lumpur, we visited the Shri Krishna Temple in Brickfields, where a group of youth attached to the temple were putting the final touches on their big *kavadi*. They belong to a *kavadi*-carrying group formed some 25 years ago. We spoke with Sri Guna Selan, 28, a marketing executive in



Dashman

a private firm who has been carrying a big *kavadi* for eight years. “I find this group to be very loving, a brotherly kind of relation. We enjoy decorating the *kavadis* and bring-

ing them up to Batu Caves,” he related. “I like to show mine to Murugan. Through this, I release whatever my tension, sadness or happiness is at His feet. My guru says that we should carry *kavadi*, because we make many mistakes in our daily lives, such as being insulting toward others. We feel these mistakes can be rectified by piercing and suffering pain. Three years ago, when I was 25, I was in a car accident that destroyed my car, but I was unharmed. I believe that Lord Murugan saved me. I saw Him in a vision just before the crash.”

We visited a home where devotees were working on 25 big *kavadis*. Dashman, 19, the youngest of the group, was preparing a *kavadi* that he would carry weighing 60 kilos, slightly more than his own weight of 55 kilos. His prayer this year was for the safe delivery of his sister's baby. “The preparation is the tough part,” he confided. “I remain vegetarian for 48 days, sleep on the floor and go to the temple as often as possible. Three years of carrying *kavadi* have made me realize that God is certainly there. It has made me go deep into Hinduism. To get the best from *kavadis*, one has to fast and keep a very clean heart. And we have to see that we do not make a show or a mockery out of carrying *kavadis*. Some people do *kavadi* to show off and don't undertake the fasting properly. It has to be just between you and the Lord Murugan to be effective. We are very gifted that we have such a unique kind of festival. You cannot find something like this anywhere else in the world. We must ensure that it is kept on the right track and does not get lost in trivialities.”



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APF/TENGKU BAHAR

Processions, Penance & Prayer



REUTERS/BAZUKI MUHAMMAD

(counter-clockwise from left) Kavadi and pal kudam carriers get started at the riverside; the traditional and very loud tavil drum is heard throughout the festival; a child with shaven head is carried by his father to the Cave Temple; a young woman carries pal kudam for her worship—the silver spear through her tongue is part of her penance and vow of silence; a priest at the Murugan Cave temple passes the camphor flame amongst the devotees after it has been offered to Murugan's *vel*.



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K. SHANMUGAM

The Temple Priests

Shri Shakti Vel, just 27 years old, is one of 20 full-time priests attached to Batu Caves. For Thai Pusam the temple management brings in an additional 50 priests from India and 130 from elsewhere in Malaysia, for a total of 200. Five of the Malaysian priests, and all of the Indian priests, are brahmins; the others, including Shakti Vel, are *pandarams*, an ancient non-brahmin priesthood who do not wear the sacred thread. *Pandaram* priests are often involved in the worship of Lord Murugan, such as at the Palani Hills temple in India. *Pandarams* range from simple village priests who know a few mantras to highly trained professionals, like Shakti Vel, whose father and grandfather were *pandarams*. At Batu caves, the *pandarams* are responsible for the pujas at the Cave Temple, though some of the brahmin priests help also, out of devotion to Lord Murugan.

Shakti Vel said that the puja pace during festival days is intensely hectic. "With the installation of the huge statue of Lord Murugan at Batu Caves the attendance at Thai Pusam has gone up tremendously." Each puja takes 30 minutes, with at least a hundred devotees attending. One hundred priests at a time manage the pujas in two twelve-hour shifts each day. Each priest is paid about us\$147 for the ten days of worship surrounding Thai Pusam. "We are happy with it," he said, "there are no complaints. Besides, the priests also receive *dakshina*,

personal offerings which are theirs to keep, and they also do pujas outside of the temple. I am very happy with the privilege of being close to Lord Murugan and serving Him. Multimillionaires come and go but do not get the chance to serve the Lord the way I do. I am grateful to the Lord because He is giving me this opportunity to serve Him due to the *punya*, good karma, I have accumulated from many past lives."

Sungai Batu

On Sunday the Batu Caves area was again swarming with devotees. We walked to the Sungai Batu, or Batu River, where *kavadi* and *pal kudam* carriers were beginning their journey. Along the way, we encountered a large number of temporary barber-shops on both sides of the road. One of the

proprietors, Pari Devar, employs 30 experienced barbers who shave 2,000 heads in the course of the festival, charging \$4.41 for an adult and \$2.94 for a child. Many parents choose Thai Pusam as an auspicious day to shave the hair of young children, an essential rite of infancy performed to purify the child. Devar's father started the business years ago, when they charged just 30 cents for an adult and 15 cents for a child. Nearby, dozens of shops sell puja provisions—fresh milk, sweet-smelling flowers and multicolored garlands—which devotees purchase on their way to the river.

The riverside is crowded, bustling place just 100 feet long and 80 feet wide, through which all 22,000 *kavadi* and *pal kudam* car-

riers must be processed. Originally they took their preparatory bath in the river; but uncontrolled development has left it polluted, so open banks of showers have been set up for bathing. A dozen priests are busy performing pujas for the penitents, and—for those who request it—piercing *vels* through the tongue and cheeks, and placing hooks in the body. It is controlled chaos as devotees shower and are rushed through the pujas and hurried out. Many *kavadi* carriers complete their riverside blessing a day in advance so they can proceed straight to the Cave Temple and avoid the crush. But no amount of crowding and commotion can dampen the vibrant spiritual atmosphere here, which rivals the fervor along the huge riverside bathing ghats of the Ganga during Kumbha Mela.

Riverside Priests

Jayagobi, age 37, is one of the *pandarams* who prepare the *kavadi* and *pal kudam* carriers at the river's edge. He serves here with four helpers twelve hours a day. By the time it is over, he will have performed puja for 7,000 people. His is one of 18 groups of priests working at the river's edge, ten from Malaysia and eight from India. He explained that devotees come to him to have their *kavadi* or *pal kudam* blessed in puja invoking Ganesha and Murugan—and Muniswaram, who is a protector. "We pray to these Gods so that the person taking the ka-



Sri Jayagobi



Sri Shakti Vel



Dr. K. Pichai Sivachariyar



RAJIV MALIK



AFP/TENGKU BAHAR

(above) Kolattam dancers perform with sticks in the chariot procession; (below) a woman offers camphor to a sacred fire

Deep Impressions

Sri A.P. Muthukumaara Sivachariyar,

59, a priest: "I think the youth are carrying forward the tradition very well. Sixty percent of those who carry *kavadi* are youth. The people who walk with the chariot and who carry *pal kudam* are mainly young people. Ours is a living heritage. Swami Vivekananda rightly said that if our youth get spiritual guidance and attain spiritual power, Hinduism will always be a winner."



RAJIV MALIK



RAJIV MALIK

Simon Kooman, a restaurant owner from Netherlands: "I find Thai Pusam something very special. The whole scene is amazing. People are going up with

babies hung on sugarcanes. They are going up with milk pots. We have seen other religious events, but nothing like this. My wife is completely obsessed with the festival. In the past fifty years, I have been to Penang six times, but had never seen the festivities here at Batu Caves. It is the first time I have seen this and so find it very special. We have been here for the past four hours after having been in flight all night, but still we are thoroughly enjoying it."

Esther Tina and Kystle Linda, born Christians who converted back to Hinduism under the influence of their Hindu father. Esther, 28, said, "I have carried *pal kudam* for the past six years, and attribute my success in education and business to Lord Murugan's blessings. Now, I am praying for a suitable husband."

Hema Lata, journalist: "I have carried *pal kudam* every year for the past many years, but not this year as I am reporting on the event. I feel the coverage given to

Thai Pusam by the media is not fair. Sensational things are highlighted and the real meaning is lost. I feel the media should explain what the devotees are doing and how it is all linked to Hinduism."



RAJIV MALIK

Shri Rajendran, 49, university professor who teaches education and psychology: "My own connection to Thai Pusam is very special. I was the third child in my family, and both my siblings elder to me had died. In the 1950s when my mother underwent a womb operation, the doctors said she would not be able to conceive. But after five years of my parents praying every year to Lord Murugan, I was born. They carried me to Lord Murugan in a sugarcane *kavadi*, just as you see parents doing today. I am sure, because of this, I became a staunch

devotee of Lord Murugan, and Thai Pusam a very special religious festival. After this, my three sisters were born."

Ramdas, leader of the musical group Port Klang Urume Melam Khandan, which accompanies the big *kavadis*: "I started this group two years ago. There are ten players. Three of us are students, and the rest work at regular jobs. We perform for nine *kavadis* during the festival, and charge \$162 each. More would like us to accompany them, but this is as many as we can manage in the time available. We have a large number of instruments and four different types of dresses which are changed for each *kavadi* in sequence. In preparation for Thai Pusam, our team fasts for three days. Most of us carry *pal kudam*, also. During the last three days of the festival, we get only two hours sleep a night. Here at Batu Caves there is a continuous flow of energy through us. Even after performing many times each day and walking up the stairs repeatedly, we do not feel tired.

"There are perhaps 50 groups like ours in Kuala Lumpur, which play not only at Thai Pusam, but also at cultural events and festivals. We have learned everything ourselves, as there are no gurus here to teach us music. We have created our own songs and lyrics, and also modified and modernized some traditional songs with rhythmic additions. Our three singers have all learned on their own. We do these performances for the sake of the preservation of culture and art, not for money. Our future plans include performing outside Malaysia. We have an offer from someone in Iceland who heard of us. The money we make goes into the bank and is used for buying instruments and other expenses, such as travel. We've produced a CD with



RAJIV MALIK

songs to Murugan, Ganesha and Amman which has sold a thousand copies and is turning a profit. This income will be used to promote character building among the youth."

kavadi is able to fulfill his or her vow,” he said. As I watched, he deftly pierced the tongues of three sisters with six-inch silver *vels*. It dawned on me that this form of penance naturally prevents talking on the way up to the Cave.

“I learned the art of piercing when I was just nine years old,” Jayagobi recalled. “I have been doing it for the past ten years here at Thai Pusam, independently and with a lot of confidence. All this comes from the heart. If you do not put your heart and soul in this job, you will not succeed. People come to me for advice on how to carry *kavadi* and do their prayers.”

“The state of trance is attained through very deep devotion,” he went on, “though it is not essential that a person be in trance for the piercing. Sometimes the demigods come into the body of the person. They are positive spirits, such as Muniandi, Munisveeran or Maduraveeran. They are like servants of the God. If the puja is performed in the correct manner and the devotee has done his fasting and prayers well, the good spirits usually come and help the person.”

“You just observed the puja I did for the three sisters. The bhakti, or devotion, of the first two was one hundred percent. In case of the third girl, the bhakti was fifty percent. I can discern this, but it is not something I tell the person.”

Once a factory worker, Jayagobi lost his job and began working during the day as a priest at a Madhuraveeran Temple and driving a taxi in the evening. He is the only priest in his family. During this Thai Pusam his group were paid \$1,470 in donations, of which they took \$588 as salary and gave the

Processions



GERAULT GREGORY/GAMMA



K. SHANMUGAM



K. SHANMUGAM

rest to the temple. Donations range, he said, from a few cents to \$30. Jayagobi is himself a veteran *kavadi* carrier: “I started taking *pal kudam* to Lord Murugan when I was just nine years old. For seven years, I had my head shaved as my offering to the Lord. When I was ten years old, I had a dream in which I was worshiping a Deity in puja. When I poured the milk over the Deity, I could see Lord Murugan, and in His chest was a Siva Lingam. Even today, when I remember this dream and talk about it, my hair stands on end.”

Minister Dato Sri Samy Velu

The festival serves as a political platform for the Malaysian Indian Congress Party, whose members give speeches during the opening ceremonies. Dato Sri Samy Velu, 70, the leading Indian political figure in Malaysia, is the chief speaker at the festival. His insights: “Lord Murugan’s message is the message of strength. He offers the power of His *vel*. Strength provides the will and ability for us to be truthful and honest and to coexist harmoniously with others in this multicultural society and country. I feel that wherever I am in this life is due to the blessings of Lord Murugan and the support of the people.”

I asked him about the criticism of the piercing of many spears by *kavadi* carriers and the breaking of hundreds of coconuts. He answered, “Some people say, ‘You’ve got to ban this and stop that.’ But if you ask me, I would say that there are different ways in which people want to fulfill their vows. We cannot deny an individual his right of praying in the manner he would like. Thai

Pusam is very important. It is a very strong Hindu festival that is respected and well received by the people of other religions. Although they do not pray, they come and see our worship. In my over forty years in



Dato Sri Vaithilingam

politics I have seen that the love for religion is something that keeps on growing. There is nothing that can stop this growth.”

Dato Sri Vaithilingam

Dato Sri Vaithilingam, age 72, a highly respected and influential community leader and president of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, explained that there are over two million Malaysians of Indian origin, of whom 85 percent are Hindus and of those, 85

percent, about 1.5 million, are Saivites. For these Saivites, Murugan is an important Deity. At Batu Caves Thai Pusam this year, he estimates, one million Saivites and 500,000 non-Hindus participated. “Some are Chinese. They buy a joss stick incense, kneel and pray silently. You see many worshipping at the festival in Penang, also.”

“The youth participate in a big way,” he said proudly. “They are, in fact, necessary for its success, as a lot of physical work goes into the festival. The youth today understand Thai Pusam better than the youth of twenty years ago, but there definitely remains a need for improving their understanding.”

Another group now coming to the festival are Indians from India, Dato said. “They have the six big Lord Murugan temples in South India, and now they regard Batu Caves, with the tallest Murugan statue in the world, as the seventh.”

On the issue of big *kavadis*, he commented, “There got to be this internal competition as to who could carry the largest, so the temples instituted rules that none should be larger than six feet wide. But I saw recently at Batu Caves 500 people arrive from a single village with a ten-foot-wide, highly decorated *kavadi* to be carried by one of them. They just pushed their way passed the guards. The guards are volunteers, trained only to reason with people and not use force.”

“Ten years ago,” he said, “there were a lot of discipline problems. Youngsters would come and create problems, but now things have improved. The discipline is much better. The youth today go singing hymns of Lord Murugan and carry *kavadi*.”

Serving the Devotees



RAJIV MALIK

Swami Guhabhaktananda

President, Divine Life Society
Malaysia Main Branch

“The main role of the Divine Life Society during Thai Pusam is feeding the thousands of devotees, which we do free of charge. We also help devotees who want to take *kavadi*, and teach them to do so in a very orderly way, without inflicting any pain to the body through piercing. We tell them that the aim of taking a *kavadi* is to carry the items which are to be used for *abhishekam*, that is poured over the Deity. We do a preliminary puja blessing for 150 devotees carrying *kavadi*, and all move out together at 6 am on Thai Pusam day.

“The *vel* represents *jnana*, knowledge or wisdom. When Parvati Herself gave Murugan the *vel*, She gave him the wisdom to cross the ocean of *samsara*, the cycle of birth

and rebirth.

“People are breaking the coconuts without understanding the meaning behind it. The coconut represents the head. When the husk is removed, it is like removing the impurities of the mind. The shell represents the ego. It is said that this shell should be crushed at the feet of the Lord, so that the ego goes away and only the purity of the soul is left. So if a man breaks a thousand coconuts, is he breaking a thousand egos in him? If he really understood the significance of breaking the coconut, then he would break only one. But he does not know this.”

.....
(photos, left to right, top to bottom) A kavadi carrier climbs the stairs to the cave temple; a devotee with the alagu or large kavadi and his accompanying friends and family a girl with pal kudan offering of milk; Swami Guhabhaktananda, Divine Life Society

Touching on another sensitive area, he explained that there are big businessmen who vow to break ten thousand coconuts if they get a certain contract. Then, to fulfill the vow, they employ immigrant laborers, who are not even Hindu, to do the breaking, without any prayer or sense of the significance. “Our stand on the matter is that if you have taken a vow, then you yourself should be the person who makes a prayer and breaks the coconuts, and one coconut is enough.”

Meeting a Family Group

From the riverside we made our way to the area near the Murugan statue, which was packed with devotees and onlookers gazing at the beautifully made *kavadis* carried by men dancing with divine intoxication. An unending row of devotees carrying big and small *kavadis* and *pal kudams* marched towards the cliff face. I encountered Gurucharan Singh, age 56, and his extended family and friends [see photo p. 31] who had just returned from carrying *kavadi* to the Cave Temple. Singh is a retired engineer and, like Balbir Singh, a Malaysian-born Sikh. He told me proudly that this was his 30th year of carrying *kavadi*. “I started taking *kavadi* due to the 1981 economic setback, during which I lost my job. I came here for Thai Pusam and prayed to Murugan for help. The economy rebounded, I was given my job back and I was able to meet all my financial obligations. I told Murugan that I will carry



(left) Looking back from the top of the stairs past the huge Murugan statue and over the festival grounds; (above top) view from the top-most level of the cave—the Murugan Cave Temple is at the lower right, the cave entrance is the dim light just to right of center; a couple prays inside the Batu Cave;

Golden Moments



kavadi until my knees can no longer walk.” I asked how a Sikh came to be worshiping Murugan, and he replied, “We believe that God is one. Therefore we come here and the *gurudwara* also. My brother-in-law, Shri Balakrishnan Nayar, whose family is from Kerala, carries *kavadi*. Our whole families join us in this as well. I have the dream one day to carry *kavadi* in India.”

Balakrishnan told me, “I have been taking *kavadi* since I was 15 years old. Originally I carried *pal kavadi*, but for the last ten years I have carried the big *kavadis*. Thai Pusam is an opportunity to do penance and fulfill vows. I fast for one month, taking just one meal a day, and my wife joins me. Thus, out of each year’s twelve months, we sacrifice one for God. I think it is quite fair. You enjoy eleven months and then dedicate one month to God. I feel very, good, clean and nice.” Asked how it feels to carry the *kavadi* and be pierced, he replied, “I get into trance and feel no pain when my tongue is pierced. Only at the Cave Temple, when the *vel* is removed, do I feel some pain; but the piecing leave no mark.”

Preparing the Chariot

At the Maha Mariamman I found a team of six men swarming over the large ornate silver chariot, polishing, cleaning and checking the electrical system of the famous vehicle that carries the Deity and His *vel* to Batu Caves. Shri Kalaiarasu, age 42, a safety officer at a construction company in America, had come back to Malaysia just for the festival. Two dozen in all work for a month preparing the chariot. They are part of the temple’s 1008 Volunteers Youth Organisation. Arasu observed, “I used to see almost all old people in the temple. But today there are more and more youngsters coming. The new generation is definitely getting associated with the festival.”

During the festival, the VYO assists with crowd control, monitoring the flow of people up and down the steps so that the caves never become overcrowded. A volunteer is posted at every other step to assist people who are having difficulty with the climb. Normally people go up the left side and down the right, and *kavadi* carriers go up the middle. But if the caves are full, volun-

teers at the top walkie-talkie their comrades on the steps to reverse the flow on one side until the caves clear, which usually takes about 30 minutes.

Shri Ravichandran Perumal, 41, chief electrician and part of the crowd control team, shared, “On a normal day when I walk up the stairs of Batu Caves, I feel pain in my knees and legs. But during Thai Pusam I run up and down the stairs hundreds of times with absolutely no fatigue and no pain. Definitely Lord Murugan gives us very high levels of energy. We are almost without sleep for three days, yet still feel fresh. I think all this is quite a miracle.”

Ravi said the chariot weighs 20,000 kilos and is illumined by 500 bulbs drawing 30,000 watts of power. The accompanying vehicles have a sound system for bhajans that can be heard a kilometer away. His job during the long procession to the Caves is to instantly replace any burnt-out lights. He says: “The most beautiful scene during the procession is of the chariot at sunrise. With the chariot decked with yellow colored flowers, the whole thing turns golden when the rays of

Babies in Sugar Cane Cradles

Correspondent Rajiv Malik interviewed Kamala, a teacher, and Ravindran, an insurance agent, as they carried their newborn to the cave shrine (pictures above and right). Hundreds of grateful parents likewise carry their sought-for children to the shrine each year.

Kamala: “After many years, in 2006 I came here for Thai Pusam. I went to Lord Murugan and cried before Him and prayed for Him to bless me with a child. I was longing to have the *darshan*, the divine sight, of Lord Murugan for a long time. I repeatedly told Him to bestow and shower His grace on me so that I could have a baby I longed for. When I prayed to Him, I said that if I am blessed with a baby I will have the baby’s head shaved and carry the baby in the sugar-cane *kavadi*. This year, Lord blessed me with a baby. It has come with His grace. You ask me whether carrying the *kavadi* was painful or not. My reply is that when God’s grace is there, then you do not experience any



RAJIV MALIK



pain. We were standing for such a long time, but I did not feel tired at all. I believe this is due to some kind of vibration which makes you feel that the divine is there.” **Ravindran:** “We have wanted a child for 18 years. My wife Kamala took this vow that if we have a child we will carry a sugar-cane *kavadi*. I am also very happy. Though it is she who took the vow, I am supporting her fulfilling it. She has

also vowed to go to Tirupati and Palani in India. In fact, she vowed that in 1995. We will be going soon to Tirupati and Palani, and I will have my head shaved there.

“Before we came to Batu Caves in 2006, we had done invitro fertilization (IVF) twice for conceiving the child, but it did not work. The third time we got it done in February, shortly after worshipping Lord Murugan at Thai Pusam, and it worked.

I would also like to state here that the IVF treatment given to Kamala was sponsored by the Royal Family of Malaysia through the Tunku Aziza Fertility Foundation. We were one of the fifty couples they sponsor every year. They had sponsored us all the three times for this treatment. So it was divine grace and the foundation’s support that brought this miracle.

the morning sun fall on it. It is breathtaking.”

Puja at the Cave Temple

In the cool of the evening, I joined the throngs climbing the 272 steps to offer worship at the Cave Temple. It was an experience I will never forget, climbing along with hundreds of others chanting, “Vel, Vel.”

Briefly distracted from my destination by an urge to take in the spectacular view from the top of the stairs, I turned around to see the entire festival compound below packed with devotees and the marketplace doing a brisk business. Thousands of families are camped out on the lawns of the large compound, having arrived from outlying areas by chartered buses and special trains.

The temperature drops noticeable as I enter the cave, a spacious awe-inspiring natural limestone chamber at least a hundred feet in height. There were a large number of youth present. Off to one side, a priest is removing the piercing *vels* of a devotee and bringing him out of trance by applying *vibhuti*, sacred ash, to his forehead. Devotees who have made their offerings to Lord Murugan are concluding their worship with a prayer to Idumban as they prepared to leave the cave.

For our puja, we purchase milk at the stall right there in the cave and offer it to Lord Murugan at the small shrine against the wall on the main floor, along with hundreds of other devotees. My fervent prayer is simply that climbing the 272 stairs will not strain

my back, since just a year ago I was hospitalized for ten days with back pain. Definitely my prayer was answered, as I twice climbed up to the Cave Temple, plus spent a hectic ten days running about the city reporting on the festival—all with no back pain.

A Kavadi Maker

Back on the ground, at the Batu Caves shopping complex, we visit Amba Store and meet the proprietor, Shrimati Saroja Maniam. Saroja has been making *kavadis* for 25 years. She attributes the birth of her daughter to the blessings of Lord Murugan. In 1982, a week after going to Batu Caves, she recalls, “I had a magnificent dream in which I saw Lord Murugan coming down the stairs from the caves. I was holding a small Ganesha in my hand. The following month I was expecting and ultimately blessed with a baby daughter.”

She sells *kavadis* for as little as \$1, or as much as \$60 for an ornate one with peacock feathers. Most are \$10. People come here from India and Australia just to buy from her shop. “I don’t just design and sell *kavadis*; I also teach people the art of carrying *kavadis*. A Chinese lady who was always fighting with her husband came to me learn to carry *kavadi*. Her prayers completely transformed her husband. Now he understands her better and even comes with her to worship.”

Festival Officially Begins

Nothing I had seen or heard could have prepared me for the actual beginning of the festival. By midnight on January 31st, the street outside the Maha Mariamman Temple was packed with a crowd of 150,000 devotees. The silver-clad chariot, brightly lit and covered with yellow flowers, was ready for its divine passenger. With a shrill blast from the South Indian *nadaswaram* horn—the loudest non-brass instrument in the world—and the staccato beat of the *tavil* drum, the priests emerged from the temple carrying Lord Murugan. The Deity, opulently dressed in gold and jewels, was ceremoniously lifted up into the chariot. For the Thai Pusam festival, He and His *vel* are brought to Batu Caves, seven miles away, for three days.

The moment the vast sea of people—waiting quietly until now—heard the *nadaswaram* and saw the Deity, they loudly chanted “Vel, Vel Murugan,” “Murugan Ke Haro Hara,” and “Vetri Vel Murugan.” The roar reached a crescendo when the Deity was placed in the chariot. Devotees choked with emotion and divine love. Tears rolled down the cheeks of many; others fell into trance. Most stood in blissful reverie, hands folded and eyes closed. I was amazed that this was taking place not in India, but in a country where Hindus are just eight percent of the population.

The crowd was packed so tightly that I wondered how the chariot could possibly be-

gin its journey. I could not even budge from where I was standing. But when the clock struck 12:20 am, the pilot car started up, the chariot began to move and the crowd swiftly parted and the bhajanas abruptly stopped. Strategically-placed volunteers politely directed people to make way. Trailing behind was a large generator that powered the multitude of lights. Next came the police and ambulance service. Security was strong, I was told, to avoid any interference by trouble-makers. A dozen or more police walked directly behind the chariot to keep devotees back a few feet. Until a few years ago, the chariot was pulled by the devotees with the help of oxen; but this practice was discontinued in favor of a vehicle.

On the Chariot’s Route

Preceding the pilot car a large crane truck operated by the electrical supply company lifts overhead wires out of the way of the 21-foot-tall chariot; others are cut outright and reconnected after the chariot has passed—leaving the surrounding area in temporary darkness. Overpasses (“flyovers,” as they are called here) enroute have been built high. One flyover is engineered to be raised when the chariot comes through.

As the chariot presses forward, the crowd swells with people coming in from all directions. In the procession behind, a powerful rhythm is kept by bhajan groups, musicians and *kolattam* dancers. *Kolattam*, akin to the North Indian *garba* dance, is performed

with sticks in a circle. Groups of musicians summon devotees to the street and intensify the sense of anticipation by conducting bhajans several blocks ahead of the chariot, then move further ahead when the chariot comes into view. I am reminded of joyous scenes on the streets of Delhi when thousands of marriages take place on certain nights due to the auspicious configuration of planets.

Devotees line the entire route, holding trays of bananas, coconuts, camphor, joss stick incense and clothing they will offer to Lord Murugan. Many break a coconut, then put camphor on one half and hand it up to the priests to wave as light before the Deity. Parents hand up babies to be blessed—at some stops, by the dozen. Those managing the chariot allow time for everyone to worship at each stop. At several locations, groups of people break hundreds of coconuts on the street—something I have never seen in India. With devotees in a long queue for *archana* and holding their babies to be blessed, suddenly a resounding “crack!” is heard as a dozen people threw coconuts down on the concrete road simultaneously. Piles of broken coconuts come up in a matter of minutes. This is a controversial practice, I learned, that some devotees are quite taken aback by. I was told that at least the coconuts do not go to waste, but are used in oil production.

I took it as a blessing from Lord Murugan Himself that the chariot passed right in front of my hotel at about 3 am, allowing me

to unobtrusively leave the procession to seek a few hours’ rest, knowing I would be spending the afternoon and evening at Batu Caves. However, thousands of devotees followed the chariot all the way to its destination.

Arriving at Batu Caves

Moving at a snail’s pace, the chariot arrived at Batu Caves at 11:30 am, covering the seven miles from the temple in twelve hours. With horns and conches blaring, bells ringing, chants resounding and arati lamps raised in fervent puja, the Murugan Deity was ceremoniously installed in the New Swami Mandapam at the foot of the hill. His golden *vel* was carried to the Cave Temple by the head priest. The festival officially began with the flag raising, which was scheduled for 4 pm, but actually occurred at 5:30. At this auspicious even, I had the honor of briefly meeting Dr. K. Pichai Sivachariyar, Hinduism Today’s Hindu of the Year for 2004 (www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/2004/10-12/40_honor.shtml) and one of the foremost priests of South India. He was there with a contingent of Indian brahmins brought in to help with the festival.

During Thai Pusam, the wide concrete path to the cave is divided into two sections, one for those entering and one for those leaving. The flag-hoisting ceremony takes place on the exit side, next to the holy spear of Lord Murugan—which nearly matches the height of the His golden statue.

Every inch of the compound was packed

Music, Fellowship & Free Food



K. SHANMUGAM

(left to right) one of the music groups accompanying the chariot on the back of a flat-bed truck; devotees worshipping at the Cave Temple; passing out banana leaves in a free-feeding hall; the group of family and friends led by Gurucharan Singh after having offered kavadi and pal kudam at the Cave Temple pose in front of the Murugan statue.



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K. SHANMUGAM



RAJIV MALIK



with worshipers. Musicians, drummers and dancing groups accompanied many of the big *kavadi* carriers, who were blissfully dancing to the beat of the music, as were their accompanying friends and relatives. The noise level in the whole area was quite high. Chanting of “Vel, Vel” was nearly constant. The music seemed to help people enter into trance. I saw some suddenly shrieking and then going into a blissful state, all surrounded by a sea of humanity flowing harmoniously toward Lord Murugan’s cave home.

Unending Procession

Thousands of devotees—men, women and children in their best traditional Hindu clothing, as well as foreign tourists—were lined up on both sides of the road along which the unending procession of *kavadi* and *pal kudam* carriers. Other devotees were performing different forms of penance, some rolling to the cave steps and others prostrating by “measuring their length.” The latter would lay flat face down, rise, walk two steps, prostrate again, and thus reverently make their way toward the shrine. Many parents carry their newborn babies in cradles strapped to sugar cane stalks—another form of *kavadi* [see sidebar, page 28].

On the morning of February 1, Lord Murugan was taken to the nearby river for ritual bathing, but most of the focus was on the worship by devotees. Everyone is drawn to watch the thousands of beautifully decorated *kavadis* that tower over the crowd as they approach the Caves. People watch not only to enjoy the colorful display, but to admire the devotion and penance of the bearers.

Tourism

This year the first day, Thursday, February 1, was a holiday in Kuala Lumpur, creating a four-day weekend that brought a much bigger turnout than usual, all the way through Sunday. Increasing the attendance still further was a big promotional program by the government tourism department. Despite the government’s laudable efforts to discourage tourism companies from promoting the festival as a “gape and wonder” spectacle, I certainly saw tourists there for that purpose.

UK’s Channel Four TV network, noted for sensationalist reporting, was there to record the experience of two brothers from England who were doing an “experiment” with *kavadi*, in which one had fasted for a month beforehand and the other had not. Dato Vaithilingam and others were aware of the project and refused to cooperate with the journalists.

The Chariot’s Return

On the third and final day of the festival, between 8 and 9 am, the golden *vel* was removed from the hill shrine, carried down the stairs and returned to the Murugan Deity, which was then placed back in the chariot for the return trip to Maha Mariamman Temple.

Before the procession started, an elaborate puja was performed by the priests at the flag pole. The flag was solemnly brought down to mark the end of the festival, though it would be several more days before the crowds would fully disperse.

This journey was as well attended as the midnight trip to the Caves. Coconut breaking began again in a big way. Hundreds

of devotees were there to have puja done for themselves and their families. To assist them a man was effortlessly breaking the coconuts in half with a big knife. The passing up of the babies for Lord Murugan’s blessings resumed outside the main gates. The chariot’s departure did not diminish the stream of *kavadi* and *pal kudam* carriers flowing towards the main shrine.



A unique penance: walking on “nailed shoes”

On the way to Kuala Lumpur, the chariot halts for several hours in the Sentul area—partly from tradition, as there was once a large Indian population here, and partly for traffic considerations. Big crowds turn out to greet the chariot as it leaves again in late afternoon. The workday is over, and students are out of school. Stops are made every few hundred yards, with crowds of Hindus, Chinese and others seeking a last chance for blessings. The chariot finally reaches the temple at about 1:00 am, and the Deity and His *vel* are returned to the sanctum.

In Conclusion

I have covered all four Maha Kumbha Melas as a journalist for HINDUISM TODAY, but this Thai Pusam assignment has been very special. The Kumbha Melas are attended by tens of millions of Hindus of all classes, castes, regions and communities; the Allahabad Mela is the largest religious gathering in the world. Thai Pusam is more specific, revolving around the Saivite Tamils’ most beloved Deity, Lord Murugan and His *vel*. They look to Him not just for spiritual upliftment, peace and blissfulness, but also for worldly things like success in exams, material prosperity and the blessing of much-wanted sons and daughters. The fact that thousands and thousands of people continue to carry *kavadis* and *pal kudams* every year is proof that whatever boons are sought are being granted.

Back in Delhi, the golden statue of Murugan at Batu Caves appears in my dreams. My wife and children have heard me murmuring “Vel, Vel” to myself many times while working on this article, and even asleep. As I mentioned earlier, on my arrival at Batu Caves, I prayed to Murugan to take care of my back injury, which had left me laid up for a month earlier in the year. Despite a hectic schedule and two trips up 272 steps to the main shrine, I remained quite fit. This experience has made me a staunch devotee of Lord Murugan.

TO VIEW A SHORT VIDEO DOCUMENTARY OF THE FESTIVAL PRODUCED BY HINDUISM TODAY, GO TO WWW.HINDUISMTODAY.COM/ARCHIVES/2007/7-9/MEDIA/HT_2007-07-01_THAI-PUSAM.SHTML. TO DOWNLOAD CARL BELLE’S THAI PUSAM THESIS, GO TO [HTTP://TUX.LIB.DEAKIN.EDU.AU/ADT-VDU/UPLOADS/APPROVED/ADT-VDU20050705_110706/PUBLIC/](http://TUX.LIB.DEAKIN.EDU.AU/ADT-VDU/UPLOADS/APPROVED/ADT-VDU20050705_110706/PUBLIC/).

Fun and Shopping!

From the top: The popular carnival section includes a modern Ferris wheel and the ancient Indian version (front). The marketplace stalls range from sweets sellers such as this one to organization information booths, free feeding halls for the devotees, bookstores and more. This stall (left) offers ornate hard-wood home shrines. (right) Members of Saint John’s Ambulance Malaysia muster near the Murugan statue. Nine doctors and a hundred nurse assistants are stationed around the compound during the festival. Dehydration, blisters and cramps are the common problems, but they can deal with any emergency. A police force drawn from all of Malaysia’s ethnic and religious communities keeps order at the festival. Years ago unruly elements would descend on the festival and annoy devotees, but temple authorities and police cracked down on the misbehavior through increased uniformed police presence and plainclothes agents.





PILGRIMAGE

Saints' Abodes

My sojourn to the Himalaya's remote temples and cave ashrams convinced me of the spiritual power of our rishis, saints and sages

BY PRITHIVIRAJ BAHADURSINGH,
LONDON, ENGLAND

THE HIMALAYAS ARE SAID TO BE THE abode of the Gods. Their mighty, indomitable presence alone is enough to lift our hearts to sublime heights. Over the centuries they have been fertile ground, producing many Self-Realized saints and sages. I count myself lucky to have been able to visit the magnificent Himalayas and offer my humble salutations to these rishis.

We set off as a group of seven from Chinmaya Mission, London, on a quest to visit all four of the Himalayan pilgrimage destinations known as the Chardham: Yamunotri and Gangotri, both sacred to Devi; Badrinath, sacred to Lord Vishnu; and Kedarnath, sacred to Lord Siva. Against prevailing advice, we began in July, 2005, after the monsoon rains had started, which meant hazardous road conditions and landslides. But it also meant clean air, minus dust and smoke, which allowed for spectacular sights.

We were probably seeking to do the impossible, but we set out with faith and a vibrant spirit. Although we did not reach Yamunotri, which would have required a six-kilometer hike, we were far from being disappointed: our pilgrimage to Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath will inspire us forever. Our very entry into the Himalayas was a pilgrimage in itself: we stopped at Haridwar and Rishikesh, where the evening *arati* worship to Mother Ganga is an experience not to be missed.

I always knew that certain places have spiritual vibrations, but on our trip I became overwhelmingly convinced of the power of our ancient rishis and saints. Temples such as Kedarnath and Badrinath have their own powerful vibrations, but there was something remarkable and uplifting about the dwelling places of our saints. We were fortunate enough to visit three such places in

In the sacred mountains: (upper left) The Ma Saravati River; (lower left) the tiny Saravati Temple next to the river; (right) Swami Sundarananda with Brahmachari Satwick Chaitanya of Chinmaya Mission at Swami Tapovan's ashram near Gangotri



ALL PHOTOS: B. K. PATEL AND N. NATHWANI



addition to the temples.

A short drive from Badrinath is the small village of Mana. A brief walk in the thin air through the mountain village took us to Shri Vyasa Cave and Shri Ganesha Cave. Then another short walk and we all stood in awe at the origin of the mighty Sarasvati River. Next to the river is a small Ma Sarasvati temple where we made offerings. Ma Sarasvati is the Goddess of Learning. It is no surprise that Shri Ved Vyasa lived so close to Her.

Ved Vyasa is one of the greatest saints of our tradition. The volume of his contribution to our culture and civilization is unparalleled. He composed the great *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. As the story goes, he dictated the *Mahabharata* to Lord

God's land: (left) Pilgrims arrive at Shri Vyasa Cave; (below) Google Earth provides this spectacular view of Rishikesh. Ram Jula bridge is just above the center of the satellite photo; the 450-foot Lakshman Jula bridge is upstream around the river's bend.



GOOGLE EARTH

Ganesha, who wrote it down with His broken tusk. Vyasa Cave and Ganesh Cave are the actual places where this writing took place. One may believe that this is a myth, but on entering the cave of Shri Ved Vyasa, who lived thousands of years ago, one is totally overcome by the spiritual power of this abode. One can feel his divine presence. I remembered the praise to Ved Vyasa in the *Gita Dhyanam*, and I thought to myself, "How true those verses really are." In the cave is a consecrated statue of Ved Vyasa and, quite appropriately, there is a resident *brahmachari* who daily recites Sanskrit verses.

I learned from my friends that countless saints have visited Ved Vyasa Cave over the centuries. Swami Tapovan (1888-1957), the Satguru of Swami Chinmayananda, often visited Ved Vyasa Cave to meditate as a respite from his wanderings in the Himalayas. I was so humbled to know this and to have been able to visit this divine place.

We also visited Swami Tapovan's retreat. He had a small hut in Uttarkashi, on the banks of the Ganga, just a short walk from the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. A Chinmaya ashram has been built around it, but the original hut is still preserved. The hut is normally closed; but for Guru Purnima in July, when devotees honor their guru, it was opened up for worship, and we were able to see the inside. The feeling of his dwelling place is the same as at Ved Vyasa Cave, one of subtle, calm and deeply spiritual vibrations.

At Gangotri we visited Swami Tapovanji's ashram, where Swami Chinmayananda studied with him. At present Swami Sundarananda, a direct student of Swami Tapovanji, lives there. Swamiji is famous for his outstanding photographs of the Himalayas. During our visit, he opened up the inner apartment where Swami Tapovanji lived and meditated. This was the third time that I experienced that same overwhelming spiritual feeling. It convinced me of the power of our saints.

We are deeply indebted to our great saints for the contributions they have made for our growth and spiritual evolution. It is a blessing to be able to visit the places where they lived and even greater is to be in their divine presence. I hope that everyone in some way may experience and be inspired by their greatness and divinity.

PRITHIVIRAJ BAHADURSINGH (PRITHIVI76_S@YAHOO.CO.UK) IS FROM TRINIDAD WHERE HE STUDIED MEDICINE. HE IS NOW IN LONDON SPECIALIZING IN PEDIATRICS.

Saintly home: (top) The inner apartment of Swami Tapovan's retreat near Gangotri; (bottom) Pilgrims in the land of saints—(left to right) Devi Khakhria, Nikhil Tanna, Nee-raj Nathwani, Prithviraj Bahadursingh (the author), Balakrishna Patel; other members of the expedition, Neha Tanna and Shayur Shah, are not seen here.



B. K. PATEL AND N. NATHWANI



B. K. PATEL AND N. NATHWANI



THOMAS KELLY



COURTESY SHARANYA MUKHOPADHYAY



DAVE TROPE



MARC HAVELI



THOMAS KELLY



JASON AND ZAC TROPE

INSIGHT

God, Soul & the World

Hindu Views on the Nature of Existence

The images here, capturing moments of wonder, introspection, bliss and communion, are windows on the eternal human quest to know the Self, realize God and understand our purpose in the world



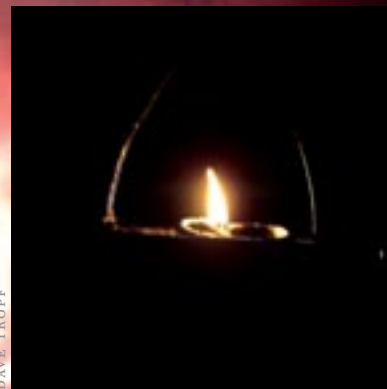
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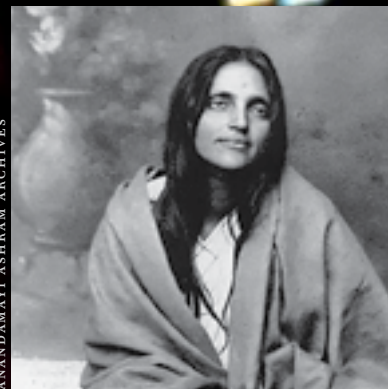
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JANGAMWADIMATH



DAVE TROPE



ANANDAMAYI ASHRAM ARCHIVES



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CORBIS



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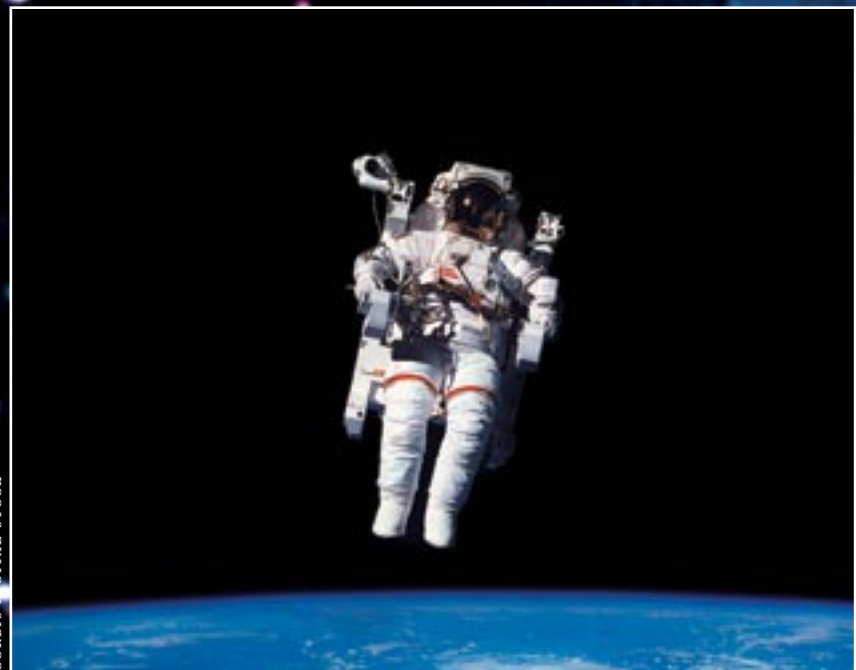
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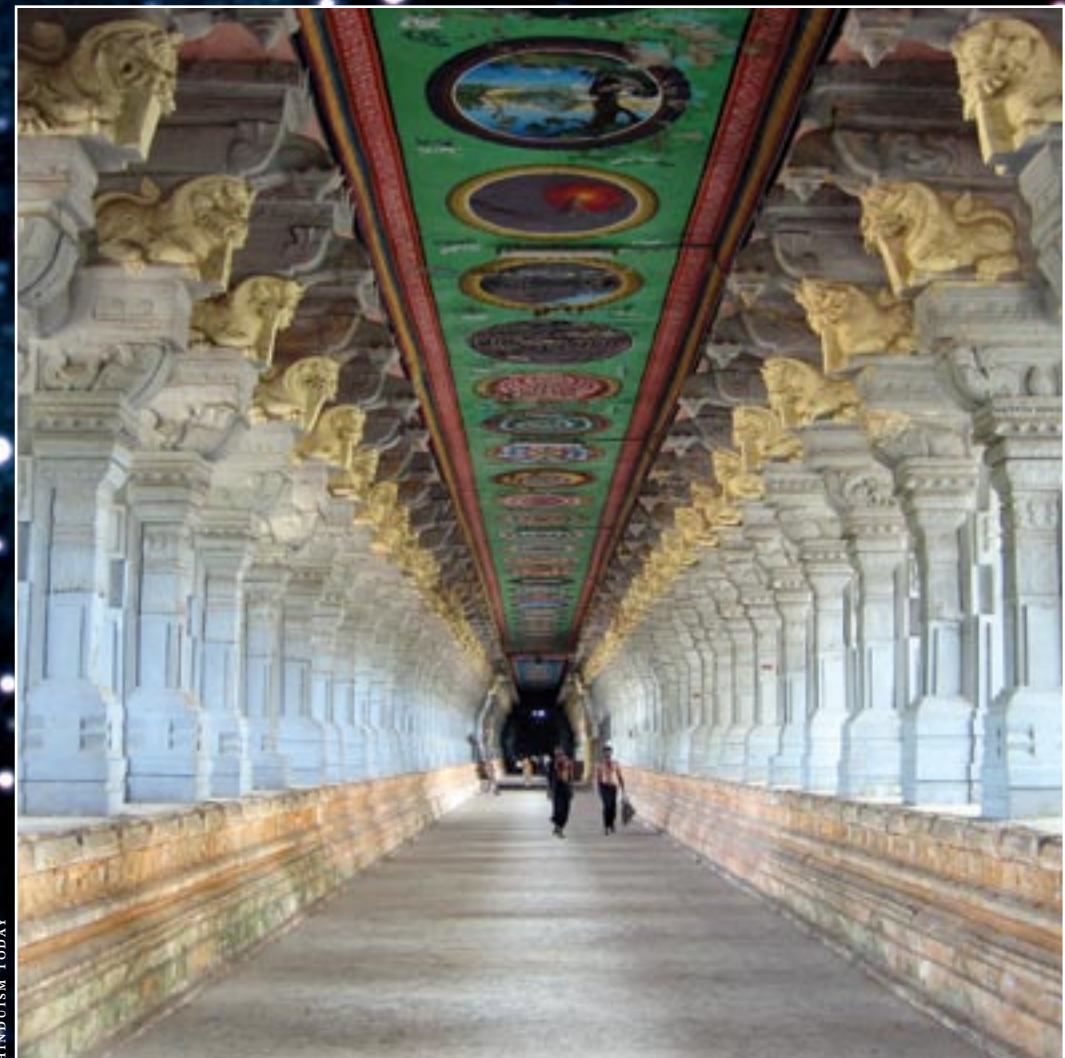


CORBIS DIGITAL STOCK

In a very real sense, we are like the spaceman in the photo above, totally dependent on our body, mind, emotions and personal identity to persist in life, just as he depends on his space suit and its supply of oxygen to enable him to exist in space. Take away our body, remove our emotions, erase our identity and what is left? Do we cease to exist? What are we really? Rishis assure us that we are immortal souls on a journey of spiritual evolution. We will take on many bodies, many lives, many different identities through the repetitive cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Each advent into a new birth is like an astronaut's voyage into the great unknown. The soul's underlying joy throughout this adventure is to commune with and realize God, learning of its true nature in the great classroom of experience, known as the world, or maya. The three realities of existence, God, soul and world, constitute the fundamentals of Hindu theology, known as *tattva-trayi* in Sanskrit, describing a view in which Divinity, self and cosmos are a profound, integrated unity. Each and every soul is on the same journey, spanning many lifetimes. The path has been made clear by those who have gone before. The answers to life's ultimate questions have been given time and time again, but still must be asked and answered by each soul in its own time: "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "Where am I going?"

Subtlest of the subtle, greatest of the great, the atman is hidden in the cave of the heart of all beings. He who, free from all urges, beholds Him overcomes sorrow, seeing by grace of the Creator, the Lord and His glory.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad 3.20

Never have there been so many people living on the planet wondering, "What is the real goal, the final purpose, of life?" However, man is blinded by his ignorance and his concern with the externalities of the world. He is caught, enthralled, bound by karma. The ultimate realizations available are beyond his understanding and remain to him obscure, even intellectually. Man's ultimate quest, the final evolutionary frontier, is within man himself. It is the Truth spoken by Vedic rishis as the Self within man, attainable through devotion, purification and control of the mind. On the following pages, we explore the nature of the soul, God and the world. Offered here is a broad perspective that Hindus of most lineages would find agreement with, though in such matters there naturally arise myriad differences of perspective. To highlight the most important of these we offer a comparison of Hinduism's four major denominations. Next we explore the views of these four denominations on liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Finally, we present a chart of Hindu cosmology that seeks to connect the microcosm and the macrocosm and is a lifetime meditation in itself.



HINDUISM TODAY

Who Am I? Where Did I Come From?

Rishis proclaim that we are not our body, mind or emotions. We are divine souls on a wondrous journey. We came from God, live in God and are evolving into oneness with God. We are, in truth, the Truth we seek. ¶We are immortal souls living and growing in the great school of earthly experience in which we have lived many lives. Vedic rishis have given us courage by uttering the simple truth, "God is the Life of our life." A great sage carried it further by saying there is one thing God cannot do: God cannot separate Himself from us. This is because God is our life. God is the life in the birds. God is the life in the fish. God is the life in the animals. Becoming aware of this Life energy in all that lives is becoming aware of God's loving presence within us. We are the undying consciousness and energy flowing through all things. Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. Our energy and God's energy are the same, ever coming out of the void. We are all beautiful children of God. Each day we should try to see the life energy in trees, birds, animals and people. When we do, we are seeing God in action. The *Vedas* affirm, "He who knows God as the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind—he indeed comprehends fully the Cause of all causes."



Above: Seated by a lotus pond, symbol of his quieted mind, a seeker performs japa and contemplates his destiny, which blooms as naturally as the flower he holds. Behind are depicted the past lives that brought him to his maturity.

Where Am I Going? What Is My Path?

We are all growing toward God, and experience is the path. Through experience we mature out of fear into fearlessness, out of anger into love, out of conflict into peace, out of darkness into light and union in God. ¶We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way. The peerless path is following the way of our spiritual forefathers, discovering the mystical meaning of the scriptures. The peerless path is commitment, study, discipline, practice and the maturing of yoga into wisdom. In the beginning stages, we suffer until we learn. Learning leads us to service; and selfless service is the beginning of spiritual striving. Service leads us to understanding. Understanding leads us to meditate deeply and without distractions. Finally, meditation leads us to surrender in God. This is the straight and certain path, the San Marga, leading to Self Realization—the inmost purpose of life—and subsequently to moksha, freedom from rebirth. The *Vedas* wisely affirm, "By austerity, goodness is obtained. From goodness, understanding is reached. From understanding, the Self is obtained, and he who obtains the Self is freed from the cycle of birth and death."



Above, an aspirant climbs the highest peak of all, the summit of consciousness. Though the higher reaches of this path are arduous, solitary, even severe, he remains undaunted, impervious to distraction, his eyes fixed firmly on the goal—Self Realization.

Different Views of God, Soul & World...

There is a wide spectrum of religious belief within Hinduism's four major sects or denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. While they share far more similarities than differences, they naturally hold unique perspectives on God, soul and the world. In **Saivism**, the personal God and primary temple Deity is Siva. He is pure love and compassion, both immanent and transcendent, pleased by devotees' purity and striving. Philosophically, God Siva is one with the soul, a mystic truth that is ultimately realized through His grace. ¶In **Saktism** the personal Goddess is Shri Devi or Shakti, the Divine Mother, worshiped as Kali, Durga, Rajarajeshvari and Her other aspects. Both compassionate and terrifying, pleasing and wrathful, She is assuaged by sacrifice and submission. Emphasis is on bhakti and tantra to achieve advaitic union. ¶For **Vaishnavism** the personal God and temple Deity is Vishnu, or Venkateshwara, a

from Hinduism's Four Denominations

loving and beautiful Lord pleased by service and surrender, and His incarnations, especially Rama and Krishna. Among the foremost means of communion is chanting His holy names. In most schools of Vaishnavism, God and soul are eternally distinct, with the soul's destiny being to revel in God's loving presence. ¶In **Smartism**, the Deity is Ishvara. Devotees choose their Deity from among six Gods, yet worship the other five as well: Vishnu, Siva, Shakti, Ganesha, Surya and Skanda. Ishvara appears as a human-like Deity according to devotees' loving worship. Both God and man are, in reality, the Absolute, Brahman; though under the spell of maya, they appear as two. *Jnana*, enlightened wisdom, dispels the illusion. ¶In this Insight, along the lower section of the next four pages, you will find verses from the writings of seers of these four denominations that offer a glimpse of their perspectives on the nature of things ultimate.

What Is the Nature of God?

God is all and in all, One without a second, the Supreme Being and only Absolute Reality. God, the great Lord hailed in the *Upanishads* and adored by all denominations of Hinduism, is a one being, worshiped in many forms and understood in three perfections, with each denomination having its unique perspectives: Absolute Reality, Pure Consciousness and Primal Soul. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds. Extolling God's first Perfection, the *Vedas* explain, "Self-resplendent, formless, unoriginated and pure, that all-pervading being is both within and without. He transcends even the transcendent, unmanifest, causal state of the universe" (*Manduka Upanishad* 2.1.2). Describing the second Perfection, the *Vedas* reveal, "He is God, hidden in all beings, their inmost soul who is in all. He watches the works of creation, lives in all things, watches all things. He is pure consciousness, beyond the three conditions of nature" (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 6.11). Praising the third Perfection, the *Vedas* recount, "He is the one God, the Creator. He enters into all wombs. The One Absolute, impersonal Existence, together with His inscrutable maya, appears as the Divine Lord, endowed with manifold glories. With His Divine Power He holds dominion over all the worlds" (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 3.1). In summary, we know God in His three perfections, two of form and one formless. We worship His manifest form as Pure Love and Consciousness. We worship Him as our Personal Lord, the Primal Soul who tenderly loves and cares for His devotees—a being whose resplendent body may be seen in mystic vision. And we worship and ultimately realize Him as the formless Absolute, which is beyond qualities and description.



HINDUISM TODAY



How Do We Worship the Supreme Being?

As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one Supreme Being, adoring that Divinity as our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life, closer to us than our breath, nearer than hands and feet. We commune with the Divine through silent prayer, meditation, exaltation through singing and chanting, traditional music and dance. We invoke blessings and grace through puja—ritual offering of lights, water and flowers to a sacred image of the Lord—and through *homa*, or fire ceremony. At least once a year we make a pilgrimage to a distant temple or holy site, devoting heart and mind fully to God. Annual festivals are joyous observances. ¶The four major denominations worship God in their own way. To the Saivite, God is Siva. To the Shakta, Devi, the Goddess, is the Supreme One. The Vaishnava Hindu adores God as Vishnu and His incarnations, and the Smarta worships his chosen Deity as the Supreme. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, Mahadevas, or "great angels," who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. The elephant-faced Lord Ganesha, worshiped by Hindus of all denominations, is the most popular Mahadeva. Other Deities include Gods and Goddesses of strength, yoga, learning, art, music, wealth and culture.



MARC HALEVI

Left, the face of Lord Siva, worshiped as the Supreme God by millions of Hindus around the world. Right, a priest offers ghee into the sacred fire during a homa ritual prescribed in the *Vedas* that has been performed for thousands of years.

Verses from Sages of Diverse Traditions

Smarta Hinduism

I bow to Govinda, whose nature is bliss supreme, who is the *satguru*, who can be known only from the import of all Vedanta, and who is beyond the reach of speech and mind. ¶Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the Gods, let them perform rituals and worship the Deities, but there is no liberation without the realization of one's identity with the atman; no, not even in the lifetime of a hundred Brahmas put together. ¶It is verily through the touch of ignorance that thou who art the Supreme Self findest thyself under the bondage of the non-Self, whence alone proceeds the round of births and deaths. The fire of knowledge, kindled by the discrimination between these two, burns up the effects of ignorance together with their root. ¶As a treasure hidden underground requires [for its extraction] competent instruction, excavation, the removal of stones and other such things lying above it and [finally] grasping, but never comes out by being [merely] called out by name, so the transparent Truth of the Self, which is hidden by maya and its effects, is to be attained through the instructions of a knower of Brahman, followed by reflection, meditation and so forth, but not through perverted arguments.

Adi Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, verses 1.1, 6, 47 & 65, translated by Swami Madhavananda

Vaishnava Hinduism

The intrinsic form of the individual soul consists of intuitive knowledge; it is dependent on God, capable of union with and separation from the body; it is subtle and infinitesimal; it is different and distinct in each body. ¶There are various types of individual souls, such as liberated, devoted and bound. The intrinsic form of the individual self is covered by the mirific power of Krishna. This covering can only be removed by Krishna's grace. ¶Krishna is the Absolute, the Brahman, whose nature excludes all imperfection and is one mass of all noble qualities. He embodies the Theophanies and is identical with Vishnu himself. Radha, Krishna's consort, is all radiant with joy, and is endowed with a loveliness that reflects His nature. She is always surrounded by thousands of attendant maids, symbolizing finite souls. She also grants every desire. Krishna is to be worshiped by all who seek salvation, so that the influx of the darkness of ignorance may cease. This is the teachings of the Four Youths to Narada, witness to all truth.

Sri Nimbarka, *Dashashloki*, 2, 4, 5, 8, translated by Geeta Khurana, Ph.D.

Is the World Also Divine?

Ves, the world is divine. God created the world and all things in it. He creates and sustains from moment to moment every atom of the seen physical and unseen spiritual universe. Everything is within Him. He is within everything. God created us. He created the Earth and all things upon it, animate and inanimate. He created time and gravity, the vast spaces and the uncounted stars. He created night and day, joy and sorrow, love and hate, birth and death. He created the gross and the subtle, this world and the other worlds. There are three worlds of existence: the physical, subtle and causal, termed Bhuloka, Antarloka and Brahmaloka. The Creator of all, God Himself, is uncreated. He wills into manifestation all souls and all form, issuing them from Himself like light from a fire or waves from an ocean. Rishis describe this perpetual process as the unfoldment of thirty-six *tattvas*, stages of manifestation from the Siva tattva—Parashakti and *nada*—to the five elements. Creation is not the making of a separate thing, but an emanation of Himself. God creates, constantly sustains the form of His creations and absorbs them back into Himself. The *Vedas* elucidate, “As a spider spins and withdraws its web, as herbs grow on the earth, as hair grows on the head and body of a person, so also from the Imperishable arises this universe.”



THOMAS KELLY



COREL

Right, the sleek towers of Singapore's famous Raffles Place exemplify our contemporary high-tech world. Above, an ancient stone carving of Lord Ganesha in Tirupati, is worshiped each day by hundreds of devotees for help and guidance.

Siva, having freely taken limitations of body upon Himself, is the soul. As He frees Himself from these, He is Paramasiva (supreme consciousness). Self realization is the aim of human life. Through the realization of unity of guru, mantra, Goddess, the Self and powers of kundalini, inwardly manifested as faculties of consciousness and outwardly as women, the knowledge of the subjective Self is acquired. Bliss is the form of the absolute consciousness manifested in body. The five *makaras* reveal that Bliss. By the power of *bhavana* [intention, resolve] everything is achieved.

Parashurama-kalpasutra, Prathama-khanda, 5-6, 11-13

The real nature is realized by dwelling in the great spontaneity. A firm stay in the universal consciousness is brought about by the absorption of duality. The great union arises from the unification of male and female [principles], and the perceiver with the perceived. Upon the enjoyment of the triple bliss, the unfettered supreme consciousness involuntarily and suddenly [reveals itself]. With the immersion into the great wisdom comes freedom from merit and demerit.

Vatulanatha-sutra, 1, 4, 5, 8, 12
Translations by Arjuna Taranandanatha Kaulavadhuta

Should Worldly Involvement Be Avoided?

The world is the bountiful creation of a benevolent God, who means for us to live positively in it, facing karma and fulfilling dharma. We must not despise or fear the world. Life is meant to be lived joyously. ¶The world is the place where our destiny is shaped, our desires fulfilled and our soul matured. In the world, we grow from ignorance into wisdom, from darkness into light and from a consciousness of death to immortality. The whole world is an ashrama in which all are doing sannyasin. We must love the world, which is God's creation. Those who despise, hate and fear the world do not understand the intrinsic goodness of all. The world is a glorious place, not to be feared. It is a gracious gift from God Himself, a playground for His children in which to interrelate young souls with the old—the young experiencing their karma while the old hold firmly to their dharma. The young grow; the old know. Not fearing the world does not give us permission to become immersed in worldliness. To the contrary, it means remaining affectionately detached, like a drop of water on a lotus leaf, being in the world but not of it, walking in the rain without getting wet. The *Vedas* warn, “Behold the universe in the glory of God: and all that lives and moves on Earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal. Set not your heart on another's possession.”

The Lord created the world, the dwelling place of man. How shall I sing His majesty? He is as mighty as Mount Meru, whence He holds sway over the three worlds; and He is the four paths of Saivam here below. ¶Those who tread the path of Shuddha Saivam stand aloft, their hearts intent on Eternal Para, transcending worlds of pure and impure maya, where pure intelligence consorts not with base ignorance and the lines that divide Real, unreal and real-unreal are sharply discerned.

Tirumantiram 1419 & 1420

This Lord of Maya-world that has its rise in the mind, He knows all our thoughts, but we do not think of Him. Some be who groan, “God is not favorable to me,” but surely God seeks those who seek, their souls to save. ¶“How is it they received God Siva's grace?” you ask. In the battle of life, their bewildered thoughts wandered. They trained their course and, freed of darkness, sought the Lord and adored His precious, holy feet.

Tirumantiram 22 & 599
Translations by Dr. B. Natarajan

What Is Liberation?

Having lived many lives, each soul eventually seeks release from mortality, experiences the Divine directly through Self Realization and ultimately attains liberation from the round of births and deaths. All Hindus know this to be their eventual goal, but the means of attainment and understanding of the ultimate state vary greatly. The point in evolution at which the individual earns release and exactly what happens afterwards is described differently in each of the Hindu denominations. Within each sect there are also distinct schools of thought. These are the subtle, profound and compelling perspectives we explore below.

The dawn of freedom from the cycle of reincarnation is called moksha (liberation), and one who has attained the state of liberation is called a *jivanmukta* (liberated soul). While some schools of Hinduism teach that liberation comes only upon death, most recognize the condition of *jivanmukti*, a state of liberation in which the spiritually advanced being continues to unfold its inherent perfection while in the embodied state. It is said of such a great one that “he died before he died,” indicating the totally real, not merely symbolic, demise of the ego, or limited self-sense. Some schools hold the view that liberated beings may voluntarily return to the physical universe in order to help those who are as yet unliberated.

The Sanskrit word *moksha* derives from the root *muk*, which has many connotations: to loosen, to free, release, let loose, let go and thus also to spare, to let live, to allow to depart, to dispatch, to dismiss and even to relax, to spend, bestow, give away and to open. Philosophically, *moksha* means “release from worldly existence or transmigration; final or eternal emancipation.” But moksha is not a state of extinction of the conscious being. Nor is it mere unconsciousness. Rather it is perfect freedom, an indescribable state of nondifferentiation, a proximity to, or a oneness with, the Divine. Moksha marks an end to the earthly sojourn, but it may also be understood as a beginning, not unlike graduation from university. *Apavarga* and *kaivalya* are other apt terms for this ineffable condition of perfect detachment, freedom and oneness.

Hinduism is a pluralistic tradition. On any given subject it offers a variety of views that reflect different human temperaments and different levels of emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual development. So, too, on the subject of liberation, various learned opinions exist. Since liberation involves transcending time and space, and yet is a state that can be achieved while in a body, it defies precise definition. For this reason, some have argued that different views of liberation simply reflect the built-in limitations of language and reason.

Many Paths

The *Vedas* themselves present a number of approaches to liberation. Some of these are agnostic; others involve various monistic and theistic views. The main classical text on Self Realization within the Vedanta tradition, the *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana, mentions a number of then current views: that upon liberation the soul (*jiva*) attains nondifference from Brahman (IV.4.4); that it gains the attributes of Brahman (IV.4.5); that it exists only as pure consciousness (IV.4.6); that even though it is pure consciousness from the relative standpoint, it can still gain the attributes of Brahman (IV.4.7); that through pure will alone it can gain whatever it wishes (IV.4.8); that it transcends any body or mind (IV.4.10); that it possesses a divine body and mind (IV.4.11); and that it attains

all powers except creatorship, which belongs to Ishvara alone (IV.4.17). Generally, the view that the soul attains the Absolute only is more represented by the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, while the *Chandogya Upanishad* mentions liberation along with the attainment of lordly powers. Most later ideas of moksha are variations on these same Vedic views.

At one end of this metaphysical spectrum are the *jnanis* who follow the yoga of knowledge and who ascribe to the view that the Ultimate Reality is formless and unqualified (*nirguna*). At the other end are the bhaktas who follow the yoga of devotion and commonly believe that the individual being (*jiva*) remains in communion with its beloved (Bhagavan). Thus, devotees believe that they will come to inhabit the divine realm, or *loka*, of their chosen Deity, Siva, Vishnu, Kali, etc. Each metaphysical view has given rise to a distinct practical approach to reaching Oneness and Liberation.

Later Advaita Vedantins, such as Shankaracharya, spoke of two types of liberation. The first is complete or direct liberation, which they regarded as the highest state. The second is a gradual liberation that occurs wherein the individual being goes, after death, first to the heaven of Brahma and then gains liberation from there without having to return to the physical world.

Ramana Maharshi, the great sage of South India, observed that three types of liberation are mentioned in Hinduism: without form, with form, and both with and without form. He considered true liberation as transcending all such concepts (*Saddarshana* 42).

The Natha Saivite perspective is as follows. To attain liberation while living, the realization of the Self has to be brought through into every aspect of life, every atom of one's body. This occurs after many experiences of *nirvikalpa* samadhi. Through harnessing the power of sannyasin and *tapas*, the adept advances his or her evolution. Only great *tapasvins* achieve *jivanmukti*, for one must be proficient in *brahmacharya*, yoga, pranayama and the varied *sadhanas*. It is a grace made possible by guidance of a living *satguru* and attained by single-minded and strong-willed discipline, worship, detachment and purification.

Thus, it is possible to realize the Self—as in *nirvikalpa* samadhi—and still not reach the emancipated state. If this happens, the being reincarnates in the physical world after death and in his new body has the opportunity to build upon past virtues and realizations until finally becoming a *jivanmukta* in that or a future birth.



Bliss: Left, in a mountain cave, a worshiper of God as the Absolute Reality (Sivalinga) transcends the mind and completely realizes his oneness with all of creation. His samadhi is so deep that his outer identity dissolves, shown by the starry sky pervading his body

Having realized the Self, the rishis, perfected souls, satisfied with their knowledge, passion-free, tranquil—those wise beings, having attained the Ominipresent on all sides—enter into the All itself.

Atharva Veda, Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.5

Summary

All schools are agreed that liberation is the ultimate fulfilment of human life, whose purpose is spiritual growth, not mere worldly enjoyment (*bhoga*). Having lived many lives and having learned many lessons, each conscious being seeks release from mortality, which then leads to glimpses of our divine origin and finally Self Realization. This consists in discovering our true nature, beyond body and mind, our identity in the incomprehensibly vast ultimate Being. Upon this discovery, we are released from the round of births and deaths and realize eternal freedom, untold bliss and supreme consciousness.

Views on the Nature of Soul and God

The concept of *moksha* for every Hindu school of thought is informed and modified by its understanding of the individual and its relationship to God. Most Hindus believe that after release from birth and death the innermost being will exist in the higher regions of the subtle worlds, where the Deities and spiritually mature beings abide. Some schools contend that the soul continues to evolve in these realms until it attains perfect union and merger with God. Others teach that the highest end is to abide eternally and separately in God's glorious presence. Four distinct views, reflected in the primary Hindu denominations, are explored below.

Smarta Hinduism: All is Brahman

Smartism (the teaching following *smriti*, or tradition) is an ancient brahmanical tradition reformed by Adi Shankara in the ninth century. This liberal Hindu path, which revolves around the worship of six fundamental forms of the Divine, is monistic, nonsectarian, meditative and philosophical. Ishvara and the human being are in reality the singular absolute Brahman. Within maya, the soul and Ishvara appear as two. *Jnana*, spiritual wisdom, dispels that illusion.

Most Smartas believe that *moksha* is achieved through *jnana* yoga alone. This approach is defined as an intellectual and meditative but non-kundalini yoga path. Yet, many Advaitins also recognize the kundalini as the power of consciousness. Ramana Maharshi and Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh did, and Shankara wrote on tantra and kundalini as in the *Saundarya-Lahiri*. Guided by a realized guru and avowed to the unreality of the world, the initiate meditates on himself as Brahman to break through the illusion of maya. The ultimate goal of Smartas is to realize oneself as Brahman, the Absolute and only Reality. For this, one must conquer the state of *avidya*, ignorance, which causes the world to appear as real.

For the realized being, *jivanmukta*, all illusion has vanished,

What distinguishes the *mukta* from the nonliberated individual is his total freedom from all selfishness and attachments, his permanent abidance in the all-pervading Divine Presence, his lucid, witnessing consciousness and his wisdom (*jnana*), revealed in spontaneous utterances.

Even after attaining perfect liberation, a being may, after passing into the inner worlds, consciously choose to be reborn to help others on the path. Such a one is called an *upadeshi*—exemplified by the benevolent *satguru*—as distinguished from a *nirvani*, or silent ascetic who abides at the pinnacle of consciousness, whether in this world or the next, shunning all worldly involvement.

even as he lives out life in the physical body. If the sun were cold or the moon hot or fire burned downward, he would show no wonder. The *jivanmukta* teaches, blesses and sets an example for the welfare of the world. At death, his inner and outer bodies are extinguished. Brahman alone exists and he is That forever, all in All.

For Smartism, liberation depends on spiritual insight (*jnana*). It does not come from recitation of hymns, sacrificial worship or a hundred fasts. The human being is liberated not by effort, not by yogic practices, not by any self-transformation, but only by the knowledge gained from scripture and self-reflection that at its core the being is in fact Brahman. However, all such practices do help purify the body and mind and create the aptitude (*adhikara*) without which *jnana* remains mere theory or fantasy. *Jnana* yoga's progressive stages are scriptural study (*shravana*), reflection (*manana*) and sustained meditation (*nididhyasana* or *dhyana*). Practitioners may also choose from three other unsuccessful paths in order to cultivate devotion, accrue good karma, and purify the mind. These are bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga, which some believe can also bring enlightenment, as they lead to *jnana*.

Scripture teaches that "for the great-souled, the surest way to liberation is the conviction that 'I am Brahman'" (*Shukla Yajur Veda, Paingala Upanishad* 4.19). Sri Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchi Peedam, Tamil Nadu, India, affirms, "That state where one transcends all feelings is liberation. Nothing affects this state of being. You may call it transcendental bliss, purified intuition that enables one to see the Supreme as one's own Self. One attains to Brahman, utterly liberated."

Vaishnava Hinduism: Forever at God's Feet

The primary goal of Vaishnavites is *videhamukti*, disembodied liberation, attainable only after death when the "small self" realizes union with God Vishnu's infinite body as a part of Him, yet maintains its pure individual personality. God's transcendental Being is a celestial form residing in the city of Vaikuntha, the home of all eternal values and perfection, where the inner being joins Him when liberated. Beings, however, do not share in God's all-pervasiveness or power to create.

Most Vaishnavites believe that dharma is the performance of various devotional disciplines (bhakti *sannyasins*), and that the human being can communicate with and receive the grace of Lord Vishnu, who manifests through the temple Deity, or icon. The paths of karma yoga and *jnana* yoga are thought to lead to bhakti yoga. Through total self-surrender, called *prapatti*, to Lord Vishnu, one attains liberation from the world of change (samsara). Vaishnavites consider the moksha of the Advaita philosophies a lesser attainment, extolling instead the bliss of eternal devotion. There are differing categories of souls that attain to four different levels of permanent release: *salokya*, or "sharing the world" of God; *samipya*, or "nearness" to God; *sarupya*, or "likeness" to God; and *sayujya*, or "union" with God. *Jivanmukti* exists only in the case of great souls who leave their place in the divine abode to take a human birth for the benefit of others and return to God as soon as their task is done.

There is one school of Vaishnavism, founded by Vallabhacharya, which takes an entirely different view of moksha. It teaches that upon liberation the soul, through its insight into truth revealed by virtue of perfect devotion, recovers divine qualities suppressed previously and becomes one with God, in identical essence, though the soul remains a part, and God the whole. This relationship is described by the analogy of sparks issuing from a fire.

Swami Prakashanand Saraswati of the International Society of Divine Love, Texas, offers a Vaishnava view, "Liberation from maya and the karmas is only possible after the divine vision of God. Thus, sincere longing for His vision is the only way to receive His grace and liberation."

Shakta Hinduism: Refuge in the Mother

Shaktas believe that the soul is one with the Divine. Emphasis is given to the feminine aspect of the ultimate reality—Shakti. The Divine Mother or Goddess Power, Shakti, is the mediatrix bestowing this advaitic moksha on those who worship Her. Moksha is complete identification with the transcendental Divine, which is achieved when the kundalini shakti—the individuated form of the divine power—is raised through the *sushumna* current of the spine to the top of the head where it merges with Siva.

The spiritual practices in Shaktism, which is also known as tantra or tantrism, are similar to those in Saivism, though there is more emphasis in Shaktism on God's power as opposed to mere Being or Consciousness. Shakta practices include visualization and rituals involving mantras, hand gestures (*mu-dras*), and geometric designs (*yantras*). The body is viewed as a temple of the Divine, and thus there are also numerous prescribed techniques for purifying and transforming the body. Philosophically, Shaktism's yogic world view embraces all opposites: male-female, absolute-relative, pleasure-pain, cause-effect, mind-body. Shamanistic Shaktism employs magic, trance mediumship, firewalking and animal sacrifice for healing, fertility, prophecy and power. In "left-hand" tantric circles an antinomianism is evident, which seeks to transcend traditional moral codes.

The state of *jivanmukti* in Shaktism is called *ku-lachara* or "the divine way of life," which is attained through *sadhana* and grace. The liberated soul is known as a *kaula-siddha*, to whom wood and gold, life and death are the same. The *kaula-siddha* can move about in the world at will, even returning to earthly duties such as kingship, yet remaining liberated from rebirth, as his actions can no longer bind him.

The Goddess, Devi, gives both *mukti* and *bhukti*—liberation and worldly enjoyment. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan explained, "The *jiva* under the influence of maya looks upon itself as an independent agent and enjoyer until release is gained. Knowledge of Shakti is the road to salvation, which is dissolution in the bliss effulgence of the Supreme." Shri Shri Shivaratnapuri Swami of Kailas Ashram, Bangalore, India, declares, "My message to mankind is right thought, right living and unremitting devotion to the Divine Mother. Faith is the most important thing that you should cultivate. By faith does one obtain knowledge."

Saiva Hinduism: Soul and Siva Are One

The path for Saivites is divided into four progressive stages of belief and practice called *charya*, *kriya*, yoga and *jnana*. The soul evolves through karma and reincarnation from the instinctive-intellectual sphere into virtuous and moral living, then into temple worship and devotion, followed by internalized worship or yoga and its meditative disciplines. Union with God, Siva, comes through the grace of the *satguru* and culminates in the soul's maturity into *jnana*, wisdom. Saivism values both bhakti and yoga, devotional and contemplative *sadhanas*.

Moksha is defined differently in Saivism's six schools. 1) Pashupata Saivism emphasizes Siva as supreme cause and personal ruler of the soul and world. It teaches that the liberated soul retains its individuality in a state of complete union with Siva. 2) Vira Saivism holds that after liberation the soul experiences a true union and



identity of Siva and soul, called Linga and *anga*. The soul ultimately merges in a state of Shunya, or Nothingness, which is not an empty void. 3) Kashmir Shaivism teaches that liberation comes through a sustained recognition, called *pratyabhijna*, of one's true Self as nothing but Siva. After liberation, the soul has no merger in God, as God and soul are eternally nondifferent. 4) In Gorakhnath Saivism, or Siddha Siddhanta, moksha leads to a complete sameness of Siva and soul, described as "bubbles arising and returning to water." 5) In Siva Advaita, liberation leads to the "akasha within the heart." Upon death, the soul goes to Siva along the path of the Gods, continuing to exist on the spiritual plane, enjoying the bliss of knowing all as Siva, and attaining all powers except creation. This is a similar view to the *Upanishads* like the *Chandogya* and

Union: Every soul's ultimate goal, in this life or another, is to realize its oneness with God. That union is depicted here as Lord Siva and a mature soul merging in oneness. Siva sits beneath a banyan tree, bestowing His Grace by touching the third eye of the seeker, who reaches up to embrace Divinity.

.....

the *Brahma Sutras*. The sixth, Saiva Siddhanta, has two subsects. Meykandar's pluralistic realism teaches that God, soul and world are eternally coexistent. Liberation leads to a state of oneness with Siva in which the soul retains its individuality, as salt added to water.

Tirumular's monistic theism, or Advaita Ishvaravada, the older of the two schools, holds that evolution continues after earthly births until *jiva* becomes Siva; the soul merges in perfect oneness with God, like a drop of water returning to the sea. Scriptures teach, "Having realized the Self, the rishis, perfected souls, satisfied with their knowledge, passion-free, tranquil—those wise beings, having attained the Omnipresent on all sides—enter into the All itself" (*Mundaka Upanishad* 3.2.5). The primary goal of this form of monistic Saiva Siddhanta is realizing one's identity with God Siva, in perfect union and nondifferentiation. This is termed *nirvikalpa* samadhi, Self Realization, and may be attained in this life, granting moksha, permanent liberation from the cycles of birth and death. A secondary goal is *savikalpa* samadhi, the realization of Satchidananda, a unitive experience within superconsciousness in which perfect Truth, Consciousness and Bliss are known.

A Monistic Natha Saivite Conclusion

According to the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy of South India, to reach emancipation, beyond all pleasure and pain, all difference and decay, the being must successively remove the three fetters: karma, "the power of cause and effect, action and reaction;" maya, "the power of manifestation;" and *anava*, "the power of egoity or veil of duality." Once freed by God's grace from these bonds (which do not cease to exist altogether, but no longer have the power to bind), the being is in the permanent state of *sahaja* samadhi, or "natural, spontaneous ecstasy," the living illumination called *jivanmukti*. This is the realization of the timeless, spaceless and formless Reality beyond all change or diversity. Simultaneously it is the realization that all forms, whether internal or external, are also aspects of this Ultimate Reality.

Moksha does not mean death, as some misunderstand it. It means freedom from rebirth, before or at the point of death, after which souls continue evolving in the inner worlds, the Antarloka and Sivaloka, and finally merge with Lord Siva as does river water when returning to the ocean. Moksha comes when all earthly karmas have been fully resolved. Finally, at the end of each soul's evolution comes *vishvagrasya*, total absorption in Siva. The *Vedas* promise, "If here one is able to realize Him before the death of the body, he will be liberated from the bondage of the world."

All embodied souls—whatever be their faith or convictions, Hindu or not—are destined to achieve moksha, but not necessarily in this life. Hindus know this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. Old souls renounce worldly ambitions and take up sannyasa, renunciation, in quest of Self Realization even at a young age. Younger souls desire to seek lessons from the experiences of worldly life, which is rewarded by many, many births on Earth. In between, souls seek to fulfil their dharma while resolving karma and accruing merit through good deeds. After moksha has been attained—and it is an attainment resulting from much *sadhana*, self-reflection and realization—subtle karmas are made and swiftly resolved, like writing on water. "The Self cannot be attained by the weak, nor by the careless, nor through aimless disciplines. But if one who knows strives by right means, his soul enters the abode of God" (*Mundaka Upanishad* 3.2.4).

This chart assembles and correlates four essential elements of Hindu cosmology: the planes of existence and consciousness; the *tattvas*; the chakras; and the bodies of man. It is organized with the highest consciousness, or subtlest level of manifestation, at the top, and the lowest, or grossest, at the bottom. In studying the chart, it is important to remember that each level includes within itself all the levels above it. Thus, the element earth, the grossest or outermost aspect of manifestation, contains all the *tattvas* above it on the chart. They are its inner structure. Similarly, the soul encased in a physical body also has all the sheaths named above—*pranic*, instinctive-intellectual, cognitive and causal.

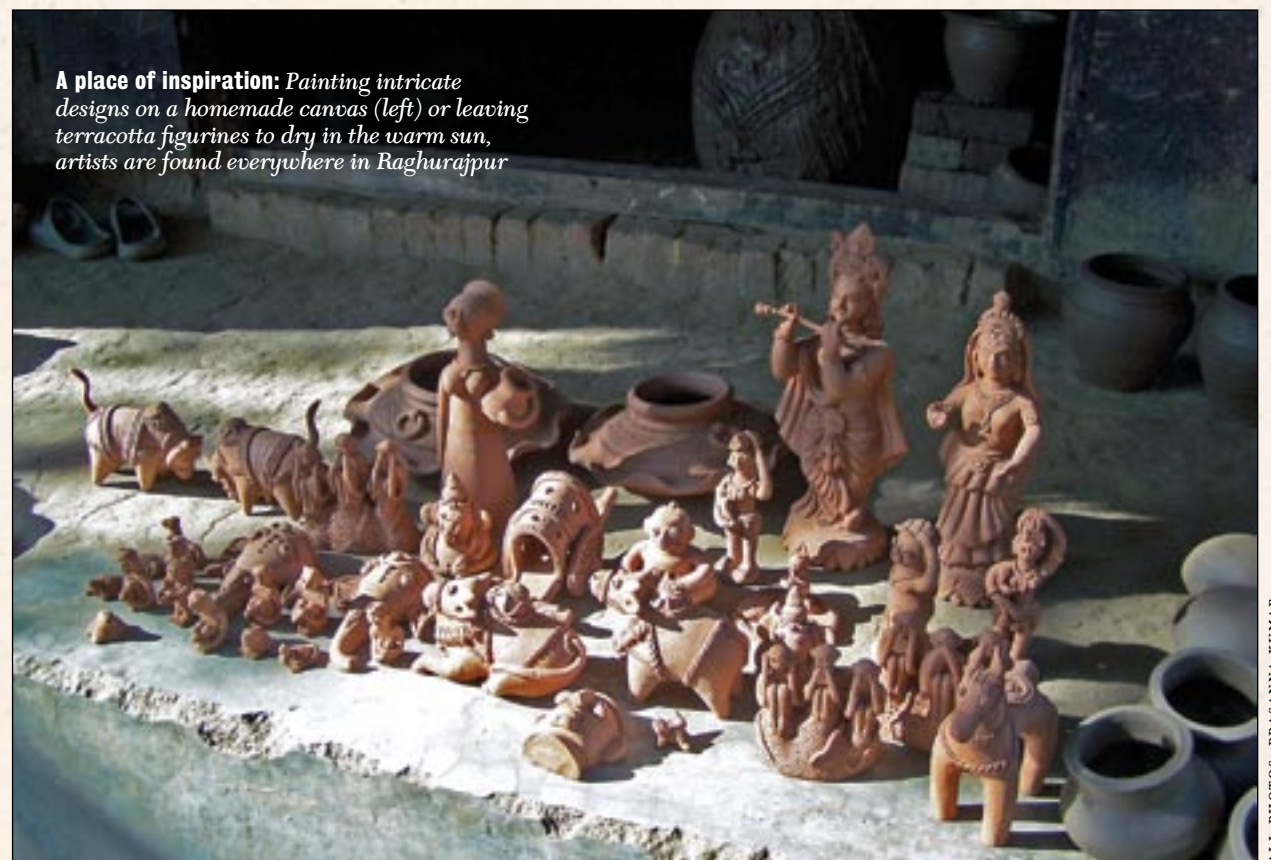
The three columns on the left side of the chart depict the inner and outer universe. Column one shows the three worlds: the causal, superconscious realm of the Gods; the astral realm of dreams, abode of non-embodied souls; and the physical world of the five senses.

Column two gives a more detailed division in 14 planes and correlates these to the chakras, the force centers of consciousness resident within each soul. It shows three levels in the third world, corresponding to the *sahasrara*, *ajna* and *vishuddha* chakras; and three levels of the second world, or astral plane, corresponding to the *anahata*, *manipura* and *svadhisthana* chakras. Note that the grossest of these planes, the Bhuvarloka or Pitriloka, has a secondary realm, called the Pretaloka, where abide earth-bound astral entities. The first world, or Bhuloka,

Chart of Hindu Cosmology: the Inner and Outer Universe									
३ लोक 3 WORLDS	१४ लोक 14 PLANES (LOKA)	CHAKRAS	५ कला 5 SPHERES (KALĀ)	Paraśiva (<i>atattva</i> , “beyond existence”) ३६ तत्त्व 36 EVOLUTES (TATTVA)	३ शरीर 3 BODIES (ŚARĪRA)	५ कोश 5 SHEATHS (KOŚA)			
THIRD WORLD Śivaloka, “plane of God” and the Gods, also called Kāraṇaloka, the “causal plane”	7. SATYALOKA, “plane of reality,” also called Brahmaloka, region of <i>sahasrāra chakra</i>	SAHASRĀRA	5. ŚĀNTYATITAKALĀ Śivānanda, superconsciousness expanded into endless inner space.	ŚUDDHA MĀYĀ: PURE SPIRITUAL ENERGY 1) <i>Śiva tattva</i> : Parāśakti- <i>nāda</i> , Satchidānanda, pure consciousness 2) <i>Śakti tattva</i> : Parameśvara- <i>bindu</i> , Personal God		<i>viśvagrāsa</i> : final merger of the golden <i>ānandamaya kośa</i> (<i>svarṇaśarīra</i>) in Parameśvara			
	6. TAPOLOKA, “plane of austerity,” <i>ājñā chakra</i>	ĀJÑĀ	4. ŚĀNTIKALĀ <i>kāraṇa chitta</i> , superconscious forms made of inner sounds and colors • LIBERATED SOULS •	3) <i>Sadāśiva tattva</i> : power of revealment 4) <i>Īśvara tattva</i> : power of concealment 5) <i>Śuddhavidyā tattva</i> : dharma, pure knowing, the powers of dissolution, preservation and creation—Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahmā	SOUL BODY	KĀRAṆA ŚARĪRA, “causal body” or ĀNANDAMAYA KOŚA, “sheath of bliss”—the body of the soul, also called the actinic causal body			
	5. JANALOKA, “creative plane,” <i>viśuddha chakra</i>	VIŚUDDHA							
SECOND WORLD Antarloka, the subtle, or astral, plane CYCLE OF REINCARNATION <i>samsāra</i>	4. MAHARLOKA “plane of greatness,” also called Devaloka, “angelic world,” <i>anāhata chakra</i>	ANĀHATA	3. VIDYĀKALĀ <i>anukāraṇa chitta</i> , • subsuperconscious awareness of forms in their totality in progressive states of manifestation • subsuperconscious cognition of the interrelated forces of the spiritual and magnetic energies • BOUND SOULS •	ŚUDDHĀŚUDDHA MĀYĀ SPIRITUAL/MAGNETIC ENERGY 6) <i>māyā tattva</i> : mirific energy 7) <i>kālā tattva</i> : time 8) <i>niyati tattva</i> : karma 9) <i>kalā tattva</i> : creativity, aptitude 10) <i>vidyā tattva</i> : knowledge 11) <i>rāga tattva</i> : attachment, desire 12) <i>puruṣa tattva</i> : shrouded soul	SŪKSHMA ŚARĪRA the “subtle body,” also called the astral body	VIJÑĀNAMAYA KOŚA the “sheath of cognition,” the mental or actinodic causal sheath			
	3. SVARLOKA, “celestial plane,” <i>maṇipūra chakra</i>	MAṆIPŪRA	2. PRATISHṬHĀKALĀ <i>buddhi chitta</i> and <i>manas chitta</i> , realm of intellect and instinct	AŚUDDHA MĀYĀ: MAGNETIC/GROSS ENERGY 13) <i>prakṛiti tattva</i> : primal nature 14–16) <i>antaḥkaraṇa</i> : mental faculties 17–21) <i>jñānendriyas</i> : organs of perception 22–26) <i>karmendriyas</i> : organs of action 27–31) <i>tanmātras</i> : elements of perception 32–36) <i>ākāśa tattva</i> (ether), <i>vāyu tattva</i> (air), <i>tejas tattva</i> (fire), <i>āpas tattva</i> (water), <i>prithivī tattva</i> (earth)		MANOMAYA KOŚA the intellectual (odic-causal) and instinctive (odic-astral) sheath			
	2. BHUVARLOKA, “plane of atmosphere,” <i>svādhishṭhāna chakra</i> — PITRĪLOKA, “world of ancestors”	PITRĪLOKA	SVĀDHIṢṬHĀNA	1. NIVRITTIKALĀ: <i>jāgrat chitta</i> , <i>saṃskāra chitta</i> and <i>vāsanā chitta</i> —the conscious, subconscious and subsubconscious mind, the interrelated magnetic forces between people, people and their possessions			PRĀṆAMAYA KOŚA the “sheath of vitality” which enlivens the physical body		
	PRETALOKA, “world of the departed,” of earth-bound souls. The astral duplicate of Bhūloka.	PRETALOKA	SVĀDHIṢṬHĀNA						
FIRST WORLD Bhūloka	1. BHŪLOKA, “earth plane,” <i>mūlādhāra chakra</i>	MŪLĀDHĀRA				STHŪLA ŚARĪRA, “gross body,” or ANNAMAYA KOŚA, “food-made sheath”—the physical body or odic body			
Antarloka’s netherworld: NARAKA	NARAKALOKA (7 hellish planes of lower consciousness): -1) Put (<i>atala chakra</i>), -2) Avīchi (<i>vitāla chakra</i>), -3) Saṃhāta (<i>sutala chakra</i>), -4) Tāmisra (<i>talātala chakra</i>), -5) Rījisha (<i>rasātala chakra</i>), -6) Kuḍmala (<i>mahātala chakra</i>), -7) Kākola (<i>pātāla chakra</i>)	SUB-ASTRAL NARAKALOKA							

corresponds to the *mūlādhāra* chakra. Below it is depicted the part of the astral plane called the Narakaloka—the realm of lower consciousness, fear, anger, jealousy, etc. Looking back to column one, the dotted path indicates that regions two, three and four of the Antarloka are the domain from which souls are reborn. Column three provides a view of the *kalas*, which emphasize the states of mind or levels of consciousness associated with these strata.

Column four of the chart lists the 36 *tattvas*. *Tattvas* (literally “that-ness”) are the primary principles, elements, states or categories of existence, the building blocks of the universe. God constantly creates, sustains the form of and absorbs back into Himself His creations. Rishis describe this emanational process as the unfoldment of *tattvas*, stages or evolutes of manifestation, descending from subtle to gross. This column of the chart subdivides the *tattvas* into three levels of *maya*, manifest creation, as follows: *śuddha maya* (correlating to the Third World in column one); *śudhashuddha maya* (corresponding to the Maharloka); and *ashuddha maya* (corresponding to the mid-astral, lower astral and physical planes). Column five lists the three bodies of the soul: causal, subtle and physical (which correspond directly to the three worlds); and the five sheaths (*anandamaya*, *vijñanamaya*, *manomaya*, *pranamaya* and *annamaya*). Note the correlation of these and the worlds by reading across the chart to the left to the two columns named “3 worlds” and “14 planes.” For more details on the subjects and terms in the chart, you can search for definitions at: www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/lexicon/



A place of inspiration: Painting intricate designs on a homemade canvas (left) or leaving terracotta figurines to dry in the warm sun, artists are found everywhere in Raghurajpur

ALL PHOTOS: PRASANNA KUMAR

Living, Painting, Worshiping Art

This village's only activity is producing precious devotional marvels

BY DR. M. P. MOHANTY, ORISSA, INDIA

INDIA IS A LAND OF MARVELS. WHEN traveling the dusty, bumpy, sinuous roads of the countryside, one can expect the unexpected: a ragged saint with realizations too deep to fathom; a humble musician with talent and skills far beyond his simple self; or even, perhaps, a village made up entirely of artists, where every home is decorated with intricate wall paintings and people of all ages are versed in crafts almost forgotten in time.

In the state of Orissa, not far from the capital, lies Raghurajpur, a small village by the sacred Bhargabi river. A betel grove and coconut trees adorn its single road, the heart of the village, dotted by several pic-

turesque ponds. In the middle of the street, five old temples show that here worship is the center of people's lives, their inspiration and passion.

Raghurajpur is recognized as a National Crafts Village by the state of Orissa, a title given to the few places where traditional methods and designs have not been overrun by modern production techniques and the demands of tourist trade. For centuries, Raghurajpur has been home to artisans and artists who supplied the kingdom of Puri with art—from special adornments for people's homes to the high honor of decorating the *murtis* of Lord Jagannath and his siblings for the amazing procession of their famous, immense chariots. With such noble artistic heritage, every inhabitant of Raghurajpur is

proud of his art and of the detailed, ritualistic techniques that have been passed from father to son for generations. In this village, every single family is involved in producing some form of art.

Scholars claim that the origins of Raghurajpur can be traced back to the twelfth century, when the vast Jagannath temple was built not far away. Following the tradition of many Indian kingdoms, everything revolved around the king and the temples. In those days a monarch would build magnificent temples to the Gods as a symbol of his power and as a way of bringing blessings and prosperity. For Jagannath temple, old instructions list 36 communities, *niyogis*, that are necessary for the temple and the royal court: metal workers, weavers,

astrologers and the artists, or *chitrakars*. Even today these sets of instructions survive here, etched in dusty stacks of palm leaves, stored in the house of a famous astrologer called Banamber Nayak. His knowledge is still sought, and to this day he trains people in some of the ancient ways of the kingdom of Puri.

Such a powerful heritage is fuel for the artistry of the villagers of this serene place, where women worship on *kolams* drawn on the streets, children draw sitting on the doorsteps of the houses and a gentle breath of creativity is felt in the air. But tradition alone was not enough to keep Raghurajpur alive: fifty years ago, it was all very different.

As with many other aspects of Indian culture, the artists' village had been victim to the conflict between the rajas and the British rule. As the power of kings declined and religion stopped being an affair of the state, communities like Raghurajpur were orphaned, losing their very purpose for existence. Even though Puri still had (and has) its own king, still holding a ceremonial post, the ways of the past had changed, and the artists were not ready to adapt. Slowly the village went to agriculture for survival, and the cause seemed to be lost. Then, in the 1950s, a remarkable son of the land, Jagannath Mopatra (1919–1988), decided

he would work to shake off the sleepiness of their artistic souls. Mopatra devoted his life to it, becoming a spokesperson for his arts in the world. He created a Gurukula Ashram, or training center, to train students to become *chitrakars*. He traveled to Russia, Japan and Indonesia, exhibiting works from Raghurajpur. Four of his pupils won

awards nationally, and he received the National Honor in Arts in 1965. Because of his relentless efforts, the artists' village once again became a place where traditional arts flourish.

Today, an artists' community and cooperative society organizes the production and creates the necessary infrastructure. Since this small settlement became a National Crafts Village, funds from the government and revenues from sales began to come. A charitable initiative from the government of distant Norway has been creating workshops for artisans in various parts of Orissa. The state government is funding basic improvements on roads, sanitation and potable water. In a very simple way, using humble buildings and modest planning, the community has established a crafts center, a library that also functions as a documentation facility, a theater and even a visitor's center with a restaurant. Much of what is produced is sold by a cooperative society created for marketing it, making commerce possible in ways that would be beyond the reach or the knowledge of Raghurajpur's artists. Tourism is now a part of life, even though this is still a very idyllic place. The elders have expressed concern that income from tourist sales might spoil the youth, who might be more interested in the money than in the religious aspects of the sacred art. But the five temples of the Raghurajpur are very much



Master craftsman: Mukunda Maharana's son and grandson follow his steps in all but his love for ganjapa matches



ALL PHOTOS: PRASANNA KUMAR

alive, including one for Gramadevati, the village patron Deity; and in them the sound of bells and incense smells of daily worship show no sign of religious indifference.

Beyond Simple Art

The art produced in Raghurajpur has a steady clientele, especially in the artistically oriented state of Orissa. Local handicrafts are famous internationally for the antiquity of their style, the precision of details, the skill necessary to make them and the religion and spirituality that inspires them. The *patti* painting style is an example. "The philosophy and the themes of *patti* paintings has not changed," according to Lingaraj Maharana, one of the most respected artists of the village, whose family has been painting for generations. "We paint just religious themes, Gods and Goddesses only. We do this with all sincerity and devotion. This is a sacred service. We purify ourselves in many ways before painting. We fast and worship. Only then one can paint the eyes of the Divinities: the eyes are the life, *jivanyas*, of the icons."

The protocol and devotion involved in these works make them special items, used in specific religious ceremonies. During a marriage, a special painting is made, a portrait of the families with the couple, bringing blessings and celebrating the new union in a work of art. In such ceremonies, even traditional items like banana leaves and the kumbha have also their individual paintings,

as if to duplicate, in the world of art and creativity, what is happening in the lives of the *chitrakars*. Horoscopes and protective mandalas are also common. The absolute favorite, though, is a *patti* cloth painting of Lord Ganesha, hung on the front door of every house in the village, giving out blessings to everyone. The painting acts as a *murti*, receiving *vibhuti* and sandalwood offerings applied by the families. "Lord Ganesha is very popular. He is the destroyer of all obstacles," explains Jayakrushna Das, one of the few stone carvers in Raghurajpur.

The inhabitants of Raghurajpur see their art as something eternal, and take great pride in this. "Why should it die?" asks Jayakrushna Swain, a artisan of *talapatra kodhei*, palm-leaf engravings, like his father and grandfather before him. "As long as God, temples and faith are alive, the tradition will continue. We are but humble servants of God."

Though the styles and themes have stayed the same for as long as the village memory can recall, scholars see traces of a fascinating history weaved in these works. Many centuries ago, until 800 CE, Buddhism was in a crescendo in its expansion throughout India. Fueled by the conversion of King Ashoka, its influence slowly spread

all over the subcontinent. There was an exchange of art between these newly converted Buddhist artists in India and established communities in places like Bhutan and Mongolia, where the doctrine was more settled and Buddhism thrives until today. Patterns, forms and mandalas went back and forth, and over the course of hundreds of years the art practiced by simple people—these artisans' ancestors—influenced and changed art in such faraway places as far as Burma, Thailand and Indonesia, where that influence can still be seen. But in India itself, as Buddhist art and teachings came into contact with the simple ways of village people, something interesting started to happen. The accepting and all-embracing traits of Hinduism began to change the Buddhist religion: Hindu Gods and stories re-arose in the paintings and the sculptures—side by side with Buddhist bodhisattvas at first. Yoga, pranayama and many

Hindu concepts became part of the teachings, in a merger that later be known as Vajrayana Buddhism. Even the Buddha came to be thought as a manifestation, or avatar, of Vishnu. Over time, Hinduism fully embraced and absorbed Indian Buddhism until there was nothing left but Hinduism. This enrich-



It runs in the families: Talent flows in the genes of the village's 120 families. (clockwise from left) A *patti* cloth depicting an ancient story; unfinished murtis of the traditional smiling form of Lord Jagannath; a painting class; *patti* on dried coconuts; a card of the fabled *ganjapa* game

ing exchange of cultures is displayed in full glory in the arts of Raghurajpur.

The Fading Ganjapa Game

Mukunda Maharana, 83, is the village elder of Raghurajpur. When he was a young boy, he learned *patti* painting from his father, Gopinath, who insisted that the family legacy should survive, no matter what. Those were difficult days for art, before the spark had been rekindled by Mukunda's uncle, Jagannath Maharana, who would later make their work internationally admired and acclaimed in festivals and exhibits. But Mukunda learned it even so, in the most traditional ways, and was initiated into the *chitrakar's* ritualistic procedures and techniques. Among those ancient teachings that were imparted to him, knowledge that he can today teach to others in the village, there was a very unusual one: the knowledge of how to play the game of *ganjapa*.

The beautifully drawn, circular *ganjapa* cards are sought as desirable pieces of art. Exotic, hand-made and unique, they make a fine souvenir for tourists or for export. The cards have paintings of Gods—Rama, Ganesha, Sarasvati, a North-Indian style depiction of Siva with a mustache—and of their divine mounts; painting of kings and courtiers, of Puranic characters and heroes. The game was mentioned in the memoirs of Emperor Babur, the first ruler of the Mo-





ghul empire of India, in 1527. The complex rules demand knowledge of religion, culture and folklore. Card sets can have 46, 96, 120 or 144 cards, with specific ways of playing each, and the rules can also vary depending on how many colors were used to make the card set. It is a game for the initiated and the knowledgeable, which may soon become extinct, its cards a mere relic. Only four people play it in Raghurajpur.

Even though some other people, mostly elders, play it around Orissa, each village has its own variations and house rules, and the craft's village is no exception. Like bridge or whist, all four players are necessary for each game, and if they cannot come there are no possible substitutes.

Preparing the cards is a time-consuming task. Artisans such as Mukunda create a special glue made of tamarind seeds, used to harden smooth, flat cloth. Pieces are then trimmed perfectly round and pasted together to form the cards; a fine layer of liquid chalk is applied to make them white. Only then can the artist begin to paint the many traditional cards, using paints he makes himself with colorful minerals and herbs and, in the case of black, burnt lamp wicks. Each Deity has a special color that must be used in the decorations of his card, according to the traditional rules, to aid identification. Since the card sets are hand-made, they all vary slightly; and their meaning could be lost if not for this standard coloring system. Lord Rama, for example, is always painted in green against a red background.

Mukunda Maharana has given to the village much of what he could share, teaching the *chitrakar* craft. His son, Lingaraj, car-

Life in many colors: (clockwise from far left) Paramanand Biswal carves the palm leaves to the right; village women worship on the street during the holy month of Kartika; the diligence of an apprentice; young Odissi dancers exemplify the blooming cultural life at the community theater

rying on the family tradition, has become a master in *patti* paintings. His young grandson, proud to carry on the wisdom of the art techniques, is becoming a skilled artisan. The elder is enthusiastic about the present and expects a beautiful future for his family and the *chitrakars*: "Our works used to be demanded only for temples and religious uses, but now many people want them. Nowadays *patti* paintings have become smaller, except for the big festival pieces, and are more refined." But even though his skill and knowledge are highly sought after, there is one piece of lore for which he has never found an interested pupil.

"I play *ganjapa* cards," says the venerable Mukunda. "I make the cards and paint them. My hands are shaking, so I don't do much. After my death the game would not be played anymore."

A Canvas of Palm Leaves

Palm-leaf writing has been a way of preserving Indian culture for thousands of years. The richness of Hindu philosophy and religion has produced uncountable manuscripts, meticulously re-copied by calligraphers every few centuries to preserve their lore. In many South Asian languages the word for palm leaf is synonymous with



paper. When the scribes, sponsored by culture-loving kings, began to illustrate literary works, another form of art was created. Eventually, this became the craft of *talapattra khodei*, engraved illustrations on leaves sewn to form a long, larger piece of art.

The leaves can be folded in many ways, creating a canvas, a small book or often a combination of both. Any renowned *gyotish* (astrologer) in Orissa will only draw a horoscope on a hand-sewn spread of these leaves. Each drawing is made using a very sharp, pointed stylus on a dry leaf. Recently some artists begun using synthetic colors, but



ings can hide or show unexpected images that are often a surprise to the uninitiated.

Patti Cloths for Lord Jagannath

The simple, unadorned, hand-woven cotton cloth carried on the shoulders of the *chitrakar* will serve a noble purpose. Purchased in large quantities, it looks scant and raw as he takes it down Raghurajpur's only road; but the man who holds it knows that soon a magical transformation will take place, as age-old lore and skills taught by his ancestors will transform it through his hands. This humble fabric will soon become a beautiful painting, a channel through which the Gods will shine their blessings on people.

Patti paintings are the specialty and the pride of Raghurajpur. It all began in ancient times, with the worship of Lord Jagannath, a form of Vishnu whose name literally means "Lord of the Universe." The temple in nearby Puri is home to the original, gigantic *murtis* of Lord Jagannath and his siblings Baladeva and Subhadra. Once a year, on the full moon day of May-June, the Deities are taken in a ritual procession that lasts for fifteen days. Millions celebrate with fervor as majestic chariots decorated by artists from this and other villages take the Gods to a special bathing platform where *abhishekam* is performed. When the curtain closes as the priests attend to the *murtis*, it is none other than a colossal, ornate *patti* cloth made by the people of Raghurajpur that gives the Gods some privacy.

For days, devotees attending will see and pray to Jagannath gazing at His image painted on this *patti* cloth curtain, with increasing fervor as expectations build up. It will

be the center of everyone's attention, the focus of everyone's eyes, until the curtain finally opens at the height of the festival amid a uproar of devotional frenzy.

During the festival, home Deities are also covered, using custom paintings ordered to exactly portray a family's home shrine.

The colors on the *patti* style are true to these moments and traditions. Bright, flat primary colors and clean lines flare with intensity and can be seen from far away. The canvas is specially made: a cotton cloth is treated with a paste of tamarind seeds with powdered chalk and brushed delicately until it becomes a smooth, parchment-thick surface. Natural paints are made using traditional materials, such as ground conches for white. But not all adhere to this strict code; in our changing times, the lure of commerce and the availability of synthetic materials have seduced some *chitrakars*.

"The use of traditional colors has given way to synthetic paint," confirms Lingaraj Maharana. "It is also acceptable to paint on silk because it is easy to export." Paramanand Bismal, a more conservative artist, disagrees. "Some of us have started using pre-made materials, but you can see the difference. Art lovers would not want them; they are not original."

Divergent opinions signal the dynamism of Raghurajpur's art today. The only real certainties are the artists' wonderful talent and deep-rooted devotion. "We are gifted by the Lord to perform this service," says Kailash Maharana. Indeed they are.

RAGHURAJPUR'S HANDICRAFTS ARE DISTRIBUTED BY:
UTKALIKA STORE, STATE HANDICRAFTS MUSEUM
EASTERN TOWER, MARKET BUILDING, ASHOK NAGAR,
UNIT II, BHUBANESWAR, ORISSA, INDIA



RAMDAS LAMB

Bilaspur friends: Ramya, in yellow blouse, with the Bhatpare clan and friends—pen-pal Kishore is in purple, left of her father, Gajanan

YOUTH

My Encounter with Caste

An American-born brahmin girl, 17, meets her “untouchable” pen pal

BY RAMYA GOPAL, TROY, MICHIGAN
MY HEAD BOBBED ON MY MOTHER’S shoulder as our car rattled down the street. The pavement steadily worsened the farther away we drove from Bilaspur, in Chattisgarh State in middle India. Our only competing traffic were herds of cows. Two previous days of riding in a train and very few hours of sleep had worn me out. We were heading to a small village called Mathiya to visit a family who belonged to the group of people once called the “untouchable” caste. Since being born into a brahmin family has little significance in America, I was brought up blind to the idea that caste had any modern relevance. Although this helped broaden my perspectives in some ways (I never assumed that I could have greater privileges because of my caste), it also made the idea of caste discrimination incomprehensible to me. My

mother sought to dispel my naiveté by taking me to the heart of a country that sometimes still follows regressive discriminatory practices based on caste. What began as a written correspondence between me and a girl of the “untouchable” caste escalated until a damp July morning when I found myself at the train platform in Bilaspur, waiting for a car to arrive.
 Although the sun had brightened considerably since four in the morning when we departed the station, the skies were still partially overcast with monsoon clouds. I felt like I had lost my bearings when our car eventually stopped in front of a house. Bhagwati Uncle led the procession by entering through the doorway where several people were standing just beyond. The only light came from the open courtyard. I sat apprehensively on the bed, blinking at these unfamiliar faces who were smiling kindly at

me. They were shortly introduced as my friend’s grandfather, her father and their neighbor. A homely woman rushed out from a room and hugged me tightly as if I was her favorite niece. “Kishori will be here in a minute,” she said in Hindi, translated by my mother, and went back into the room. I fidgeted with my glasses and managed a self-conscious smile.
 Kishori, age 19, and I had been pen pals for almost two years, but had never met. We were introduced by Dr. Ramdas Lamb, professor of religion at the University of Hawaii. He’s an advisor to my mother’s Hindu reform organization, Navya Shastra, and has been associated with Kishori’s village for many years. She would write letters in Hindi, which my mother would translate for me; I would write back in English, and someone would translate for her. We wrote about our personal lives and day-to-day hap-



RAMDAS LAMB

Pen pals: Ramya Gopal and Kishori met for the first time in Bilasur after corresponding for two years

penings, exchanging our thoughts on cultural novelties. Her letters were always very sweet. Within a few months we became close friends, and I began to call her “my sister.” Although she continually invited me to visit her in Chattisgarh, time had not permitted me to accept her invitation until now. “Kishori! Kishori!” her mother called several times. A few minutes passed, then a young woman briskly walked out with her head bowed shyly and came to sit on the cot beside me. There was an awkward silence, followed by a melee medley of Hindi and English, and then silence again. “Kishori, I am so happy to see you,” I started in English. She smiled and nodded. I said, “How are you? How do you like school?” I asked many questions, not knowing where to begin. Kishori explained—in Hindi, again translated into English by my mother—that she was in the second year of college, but she had spent most of the first year of college at home. “I learned better studying at home. The teachers hardly taught us anything,” she said. I learned that her favorite subject was geography, that she was an English major who had read the works of Keats and Tennyson and studied in a government college predominantly for the Scheduled Castes. *Scheduled Caste* (pronounced as “shed-uled”) was a term resulting from the British government in The Government Act of 1935. It formally abolished untouchability and reclassified the lower-castes in lists, or schedules, hence Scheduled Castes. Gandhiji introduced the word *Harijans* (children of God) to describe them, believing that the connotation of the word was more uplifting than merely “Scheduled Caste,” but this

“As friends, the upper castes treat me fine. When we are together in a religious space, we see their true colors.”

—KISHORI

term did not receive the welcome he had expected. “Gandhiji separated us when he called us Harijans,” explained neighbor Mohan Ram. Kishori’s father and her grandfather nodded in agreement. Another grouping, ranked slightly higher by the British, was called “Other Backward Castes,” or OBCs. Although both were derided equally by the still higher castes, the OBCs were determined to maintain their traditional social superiority over the SCs, based solely on their higher ranking in the 1935 act, Dadaji explained. He mused, “OBCs eat meat and drink alcohol, while we are pure vegetarians, but are still considered lower.”
 Dadaji is a friendly, bespectacled grandfather who speaks patiently, as if he has come to terms with his life. “In my time,” he began, “there was much discrimination. I stayed in a hostel in college. We SCs were forced to sleep and eat separately from all the other castes. Even when we were working, we would sit separately from them because we had grown to be scared of them. The officers would look at me as if I were beneath them. Even today, all the houses in each area of the village are for people belonging to the same caste.” He pointed to the fork in the road that separated the houses of the SCs from the houses of the OBCs.
 Kishori’s father, Professor Gajanan Bhatpare, explained that Kishori wasn’t always spared the whiplash of discrimination. “She usually receives very good grades. But her schoolmates sometimes become jealous that she is from a lower caste, yet she gets higher scores than they do. The upper caste students taunt her behind her back, but they keep their jealousy inside more, because we are a respectable, educated family. The upper castes pick more on other families.” Kishori’s father is a professor of political science at her college; his brother, Bhagwati Uncle, is a geography teacher at a high school.
 Professor Lamb arrived midway through the conversation, having come from Hawaii to Bilaspur to teach as a visiting professor. In this way he has been helping this village for the last thirty years. “Gajanan,” he started, “is the ideal teacher. Everyone looks up to him and his family, and all the students come to his house. The families trust Bhatpare Sir.” “Yet,” he continued,

“the families won’t eat with them or perform religious ceremonies with them. I’ve even seen them put up a string which they cannot cross. They know better, and on an individual level, they won’t feel discrimination, but at a social level, they will.” Kishori spoke up to reinforce this point: “As friends, the upper castes treat me fine. When we are together in a religious space, we see their true colors.”
 Bhagwati Uncle’s two sons entered the room, bowing to their relatives and my father with a polite smile and touching the feet of my mother, Kishori and me. I looked inquisitively about for someone to explain what was going on. “We touch the feet of the niece and nephew as respect for Kauslya and Ram,” Monu helpfully clarified with a smile. “All castes except brahmins do this, but especially us since we are Satnamis.” Satnami is a sect of Hinduism, found mostly in the scheduled caste areas of Chattisgarh, which was founded by the Ram bhaktar, Guru Ghasidas (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru_Ghasidas). “Ramya didi (sister), deep down I wonder why I should be considered lower than others. It’s not something I’m happy with,” he said with a pained expression. “But I’m happy to be a Satnami.”
 Sonu agreed with his brother’s sentiments. “Indirectly, discrimination happens. The minute they find out that we might be reservation students, their attitude changes completely. When someone asks me if I am an untouchable, I feel very sad. Papa feels sad, too.”
 “We try to do things for our people, but it’s not enough,” Bhagwati Uncle told us sadly. “It really hurts. Sometimes, we just want to run away from here.” Professor Ramdas Lamb commented with a worn expression, “This isn’t going to change for another few generations.”
 These words, their story, was my introduction to a turbulent world that had never converged with mine before. I was dumbfounded. Caste discrimination is an idea that seems simplistically backwards, but the people of Mathiya, a microcosm of the larger SC communities, gave it reality and immediacy through the telling of their painful stories. Although I realized that I could never completely understand the trauma of their experiences and the bleak despair of the future, this encounter took me one step forward.

RAMYA GOPAL, 17, IS A FRESHMAN AT SWARTHMORE COLLEGE IN PENNSYLVANIA.

Teenage Depression

Beware the causes and the drawbacks of standard treatments for this unfortunately common ailment

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

FOUR OUT OF 100 TEENAGERS BECOME SERIOUSLY depressed each year. Everybody feels sad now and then; but if they're sad most of the time, and it's causing problems in school and with relationships with family and friends, they may be clinically depressed.

What is depression? Clinical depression is a serious illness that can affect anybody, including teenagers. It can affect their thoughts, feelings, behavior and overall health. Common symptoms are poor appetite, insomnia or excessive sleep habits, hyperactivity or inactivity, loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or self-reproach, diminished ability to think or concentrate, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. Intense bouts of depression that last for weeks at a time are called major depression. A less severe form can linger at a low level for years. A third form is a depressive reaction to a specific life event, such as a death, divorce or other loss, when the adjustment to the loss takes longer than normal or is more severe than expected and interferes with the person's daily activities. And there is another condition, bipolar disorder (also called manic depressive illness), in which periods of major depression alternate with periods of abnormally high mood and extreme bursts of unusual activity, called mania.

What causes depression? Depression can be the result of psychological as well as physiological factors. The predominant psychological theory asserts that depression is the result of habitual feelings of pessimism and hopelessness. The chief physiological theory points to imbalances of monoamine neurotransmitters such as serotonin, epinephrine, and norepinephrine. Serotonin deficiency is the most common biochemical cause.

It is important to screen for the various simple, organic factors which are known to contribute to depression. These include nutrient deficiency, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), hypothyroidism (low thyroid function) and drugs—not only prescription and illicit drugs, but also alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, etc. Although it is uncommon to perform lab tests in the diagnosis of depression, I run a thorough blood and urine test for these factors to determine if any of them is causing a chemical imbalance.

The brain requires a constant supply of blood sugar to function properly, so hypoglycemia must be avoided. Symptoms of hypoglycemia can range from mild to severe and can include depression, anxiety, irritability, fatigue, headache, blurred vision, mental confusion, incoherent speech and convulsions. Several studies have shown that hypoglycemia is common in depressed individuals. Simply eliminating from the diet refined carbohydrates and caffeine, which can aggravate hypoglycemia, is sometimes sufficient treatment for those whose depression results from hypoglycemia.

Food allergy is a causative factor in other cases of depression. Eliminating offending foods can bring about tremendous relief.

A deficiency of any single nutrient can alter brain function and lead to depression, anxiety and other mental disorders. Particularly essential in this context are vitamin B12, folic acid and other B



fluoxetine (Prozac), fluvoxamine (Luvox), paroxetine (Paxil) and sertraline (Zoloft). Other similar drugs are venlafaxine (Effexor), nefazodone (Serzone), clomipramine (Anafranil) and bupropion (Wellbutrin). All of these drugs correct decreased levels of specific neurotransmitters in the blood that can cause or contribute to depression.

Do these drugs pose risks to children and teens? In 2003 the British Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency banned the pediatric use of all SSRIs except Prozac due to evidence from clinical trials showing that children taking SSRIs were driven to acute emotional distress, leading some of them to become suicidal and homicidal. In December, 2003, after reviewing 22 clinical trials showing that children using nine SSRIs were on average almost twice as likely to become suicidal, senior US Food and Drug Administration epidemiologist Dr. Andrew D. Mosholder recommended a ban on pediatric use of the drugs. The FDA barred him from presenting his conclusions publicly and commissioned researchers at Columbia University to re-examine the data. Their findings were virtually the same. In September, 2004, the FDA released a long-awaited analysis concluding that young patients taking antidepressants could be at increased risk for self-harm. They directed manufacturers to add black-box warnings (the most serious kind of warning) on doctor labeling to describe the increased risk of suicidality in young people being treated with antidepressants. The label wording includes a reminder that Prozac is currently the only medication approved to treat depression in children and adolescents. The FDA also planned to develop a patient medication guide to be given along with prescriptions.

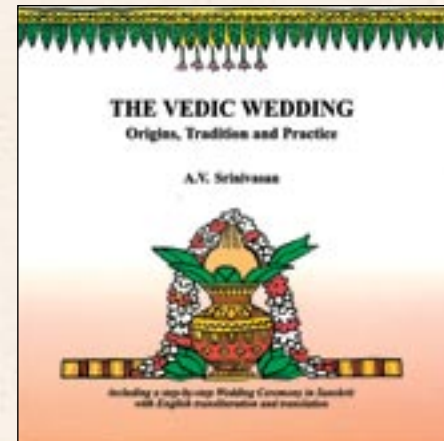
Although increased risk of suicidal behavior in youth may be the worst side effect of antidepressant drugs, there are many others. In my article in the coming October/November/December, 2007, issue of HINDUISM TODAY I will offer natural remedies from the ayurveda tradition that I have found to be effective in the treatment of depression.

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vitamins, and the omega-3 fatty acids.

What are the standard treatments for depression? Most people are treated with counseling, or psychotherapy, which is talking about feelings with a trained psychologist who can help one change the relationships, thoughts or behaviors that are causing the depression. Your child may feel depressed because she thinks her life is bad. What if she is wrong? What if her future holds a lot more promise than she thinks? When someone is depressed, they are in a rut, and they can't see anything positive. They need to talk to someone who can help them get out of that rut. Young people should seek help from parents or their school counselor. Parents need to take a very active role by first recognizing that their child is depressed and then providing all the help they can.

Some people are helped with counseling and medicine. Doctors routinely prescribe a number of different antidepressant medications. These differ in their side effects and levels of effectiveness. The most common drugs prescribed today for depression are the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), including



BOOKS

The Vedic Wedding

Understanding what it all means, step by step

BY TARA KATIR, WASHINGTON

THE RITUAL OF CIRCUMAMBULATING the sacred fire binds a Hindu couple together in a tradition that has been followed in India for thousands of years.

To sustain these customs outside India is Dr. A.V. Srinivasan's stated intention in his new book, *The Vedic Wedding: Origins, Tradition and Practice* (Periplus Line LLC, 268 pages). Srinivasan explains, "The inspiration came from the young Indians in the United States who sought my advice in the past three decades and asked me to officiate at their weddings. I have been impressed by their genuine interest in understanding Vedic wedding practices and philosophy."

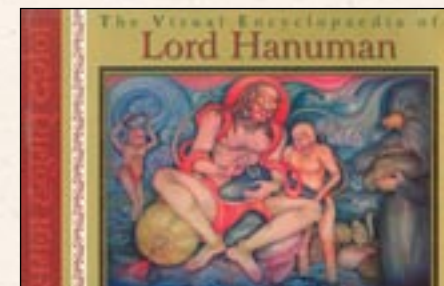
Srinivasan's book is a solution for contemporary Hindu couples in the West who wish to fully comprehend their marriage ceremony. Chapters on the Hindu philosophy of marriage, the origins of the ceremony in the *Vedas*, *Shastras*, *Grihya Sutras* and popular traditions and customs, provide good preparation for understanding the ritualistic ceremony, which is covered in chapter four. In addition, readers will find detailed instructions for required accoutrements, music selection, rehearsal, bridal attire and cosmetics, special pujas done by the bride and groom and a bevy of additional ceremonies one may choose to include. There is even a practical section on homa fire safety. The book is well researched and a welcome help.

THE VEDIC WEDDING, ORIGINS, TRADITION AND PRACTICE BY A.V. SRINIVASAN, PERIPLUS LINE LLC, P.O. BOX 56, EAST GLASTONBURY, CT 06025-0056, 2006. 268 PAGES.

Hindu Posters

TO GIVE AN ACCURATE portrayal of the rich Hindu cultural heritage, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA created a popular exhibition presenting Hindu dharma and culture through a series of 30 posters (example at right), which have now been compiled into *Hindu Culture and Dharmic Traditions from India*. The posters illustrate the firm roots of our ancient dharma in the archeological past and show how Hinduism's lofty cosmological laws are finding themselves accepted by some modern astronomers and physicists. Hindu dharma, way of living and temple worship, the exhibition points out, have found a welcoming home in America after influencing Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and various Caribbean countries over the centuries. Yoga and ayurveda, once the privied province of ancient Hindu India, are now the rage throughout the West. Teachers and parents should bring this book to the attention of school curriculum directors. It is a creative teaching tool to help counter the misinformation published in textbooks regarding Indian religious practices and history.

HINDU CULTURE AND DHARMIC TRADITIONS FROM INDIA, PUBLISHER HSS, USA, 121 HAWTHORNE COURT, ROCKAWAY, NJ 07866 (30 PAGES) \$15. WWW.HSSUS.ORG.



Hanuman Twice!

SUNEEL GOMBER, DEVOTEE OF LORD Hanuman and founder of J. B. Charitable Trust, has compiled two lovely books on Lord Hanuman: *The World of Lord Hanuman* and *The Visual Encyclopedia of Lord Hanuman* (J.B. Charitable Trust, 188 and 247 pages respectively). For *The World of Lord Hanuman*, Gomber collected material from 51 websites devoted to Hanuman and compiled it into 31 articles. Gomber states, "These sites, which are maintained by highly learned international scholars, provide a wonderful insight into the references on Lord Hanuman drawn

from various sacred and religious scripture. By the grace of Hanumanji, I have been able to compile the storehouse of information and knowledge of these websites into a collection of articles in this book."

The result is a marvelous volume that guides readers through the long and complicated details of Lord Hanuman's life and relationship with Lord Rama.

In 2004, Suneel Gomber established the Museum of Hanumat Sangrahalaya, "a vast collection of rare books, paintings, Deities and murals depicting Lord Hanuman in various divine forms."

The Visual Encyclopedia of Lord Hanuman is a 247-page compilation of the many sketches, paintings and photographs belonging to the Hanuman Museum. The art is presented in brilliant full color whenever possible; a caption under each picture details its origin. Whether you are a devotee of Lord Hanuman or just love the *Ramayana* and Indian art, these two books are great additions to your personal library.

THE WORLD OF LORD HANUMAN BY SUNEEL GOMBER AND PRASHANT GUPTA, 188 PAGES, RS 350. THE VISUAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LORD HANUMAN, SUNEEL GOMBER, ENGLISH TEXT BY DR. N.S.R. SASTRY, HINDI TRANSLATION BY DR. YOGESH PRAVEEN, 247 PAGES, RS 695. BOTH PUBLISHED BY J.B. CHARITABLE TRUST (REGD.), 14/1192, INDIRA NAGAR, LUCKNOW 226 016, U.P., INDIA.

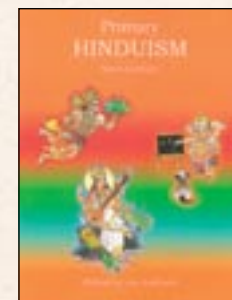
Hinduism for Children

VIVEKANANDA CENTRE LONDON has published a new book by Seeta Lakhani, *Primary Hinduism*, as part of a series of textbooks (including *Hinduism for Schools* for older children) designed to ensure that Hinduism taught in the West is "both comprehensive and comprehensible."

Utilizing appealing narratives and colorful images to make Hinduism interesting and exciting for the very young, this new book is designed for use by 6- to 13-year olds ("key stages" 1 to 3 in the UK school system). In simple language and informative illustrations, it presents easy-to-understand explanations of Hindu beliefs and practices.

A companion website, www.hinduism.fsnet.co.uk/, offers supporting resources for the books.

HINDUISM FOR SCHOOLS BY SEETA LAKHANI, PUBLISHER VIVEKANANDA CENTRE LONDON, 6 LEA GARDENS, WEMBLEY, MIDDLESEX HA9 7SJ, 133 PAGES, £12. FOR UK AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER FROM WWW.VIVEKANANDA.CO.UK. IN USA, WWW.MINIMELA.COM.





Treatment: Warmed oil, infused with the essence of medicinal plants, is poured in the eyes

HEALTH

Curing Incurable Eyes

Kerala's Sreedhareeyam eye hospital brings Ayurveda's wisdom to bear on eye diseases

BY VRINDAVANAM S. GOPALAKRISHNAN

FROM ALL OVER INDIA AND FAR BEYOND her borders, people come to Sreedhareeyam Ayurvedic Eye Hospital and Research Center in Kerala. Many come to cure ailments unhealed by modern medicine, such as rheumatoid arthritis. But this hospital, set in the village of Kizhkompu, near the city of Kochi, is best known for treating diseases of the eye.

Dr. N. P. P. Namboothiri is the managing director and chief medical officer of Sreedhareeyam.

He has also served for three decades as the chief medical officer of the Kerala government's state-owned ayurvedic hospital. His family, owners of a precious collection of old medical manuscripts inscribed on *ola* leaves, have for four generations been ayurvedic physicians specializing in treating eye disease.

The research-oriented approach of the present generation of the physicians, combined with the availability of modern facilities, has culminated in the birth of this

well-equipped 500-bed eye hospital, which treats 200 to 300 patients daily. The rural setting, overlooking a lush green expanse of paddy fields, provides the clean and serene atmosphere required for convalescence. The hospital maintains its own cow and goat dairy, as well as a large garden to grow rare species of medicinal plants and other required herbs. It is equipped with modern diagnostic tools, and maintains six private cottages for the convenience of patients. All medicines and formulations used in eye treatment are manufactured in their own certified factory under the supervision of Dr. Namboothiri according to the traditional formulas.

"We could provide this with the grace of our family Deity, Bhadrakali," says Dr. Namboothiri.

For Mr. N. P. Narayanan Namboothiri, chairman of Sreedhareeyam, it is not medicine alone that cures disease. Divine intervention should always be sought. Therefore, all the drugs manufactured are taken to the Deity at the temple in the hospital complex to be blessed by the Goddess. When treatment is begun, the patient is brought to the entrance of the traditional home, where the first dose of medicine is administered in front of the sacred lamp after offering prayers. Patients participate in this tradition regardless of their different religious beliefs.

Many eye diseases are treated here, including retinitis pigmentosa caused by diabetes. This disease is most often seen in children born from blood-related parents, and Western allopathic medicine offers no treatment for it. Other conditions treated here include macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataract and detached retina. Each is approached with a customized regimen of ayurvedic medicines, eye exercises and diet.

Attributing the ever-increasing incidence of eye ailments among children to the fast life, fast food and continuous viewing of television, Dr. N. P. P. Namboothiri said that absence of eye exercise is a major reason for some of the ailments. He states that eye exercise is of paramount importance, pointing

out that skilled practitioners of Bharatanatyam and other traditional dance forms, with their intense patterns of eye movement, have the lowest incidence of eye diseases.

The ancient ayurvedic scriptures describe the treatment of many illnesses for which "modern" medicine has found no remedies, such as retinitis pigmentosa. The *Shalakya Tantra*, for instance, contains descriptions of some 76 eye diseases, 28 ear diseases and 31 nose diseases.

Dr. Namboothiri told HINDUISM TODAY, "*Urdhwanga Chikita*, or *Shalakya Tantra*, is one of the eight branches of ayurveda. It offers a detailed study of the etiology, diagnosis, prognosis, prevention and treatment of diseases affecting the organs in the head and neck—the ears, nose, eyes, throat, etc. Of the three main classic texts of ayurveda, *Susrutha Samhitha* provides the most profound knowledge on this branch of treatment. Acharya Susrutha was the greatest proponent of this science. He could be hailed as the pioneer surgeon in medical history who systematically and elaborately dealt with the anatomical structure of the eye. The prognoses made by him on aveitis and glaucoma are regarded as exceptional."

Dr. Sharat Menon, a professor from Texas, USA, who has undergone treatment at Sreedhareeyam, told HINDUISM TODAY that based on his experience with other such institutions in recent years, Sreedhareeyam is unparalleled in the ayurvedic treatment of eye ailments.

Another enthusiastic Sreedhareeyam patient is Dr. James Lunney, an experienced physician from Canada. He says, "ayurveda is the ancient medical system of India which encompasses the healing of body, mind and spirit." This is accomplished through diet, lifestyle and rejuvenation, along with the use of cleansing programs and medicinal herbs. Instead of focusing narrowly on the patient's current disorder, ayurvedic medicine targets the root cause of disease—not only treating the disorder itself but also eliminating problems before they arise.

See www.sreedhareeyam.com



Healing and teaching: Above, mixing a hot oil infusion of medicinal herbs; below, left to right, eye exercise class; Dr. N.P.P. Namboothiri, Managing Director and Chief Medical officer; Dr. Namboothiri reads *ola* leaf medical texts to students and staff; a child's eye examination; grinding plant materials into pastes and powders





SACRED CRAFT

Kauai's Stone Artisans

An American reporter marvels at the meeting of skill and devotion in Iraivan Temple's carving team

We at HINDUISM TODAY were pleased when our local Kauai newspaper, "The Garden Island," took an interest in the Iraivan Temple being constructed at our headquarters. It is the first Chola-style stone temple built outside of India. On March 2, 2007, they ran this story of these remarkable craftsmen, the first of their clan to leave India and build a temple far from their home.

BY KEIRA KEITA, KAUAI, HAWAII

HIGH ABOVE AN EMERALD GREEN valley, dripping with tropical vines and ancient trees, a gentle tapping of iron and stone fills sunlit hours. Six master stone carvers from Karakudi in Southern India are patiently carving the intricate details on pillars of granite, one chip at a time. The gentle tapping of the iron and stone is reflected in the hand-made monument that many would believe was carved from deafening machines and electric tools. The founding guru of this temple, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva, 1927-

2001, also founder of HINDUISM TODAY), is responsible for having chosen the site of the monastery as well as envisioning the cultural exchange that is now being carried out in order to build the permanent structure.

Added together, the six artists working on this place of worship have 98 years' experience—several began as young as 13 years old. This commission is called, by those involved, a unique and honorable work, as it is the first time that a Hindu temple is being fabricated with the identical traditional methods used in India over 1,000 years ago. The artisans work six days a week, for two years, before returning to their home. When asked if this time away is a terrible hardship, they say, "It is a typical aspect of the stone carver's job to be away from home working on a site for several months per year. In addition, we are so pleased to be working on this project in Kauai and we see it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

The translator for the Tamil-speaking artisans, Yoginathaswami, who coordinates their

A rock-solid squad: The silpi team at the entrance of Iraivan Temple

work, added, "for this birth and perhaps many to come, they feel this is a unique and wonderful opportunity."

The tradition of carving in India is regarded differently depending on what it is one is carving. Temple carvers, *silpis*, hold a higher respect among Indian society than craftsman who make tools or everyday items. While three of Kauai's visiting artists came to the profession because their fathers or grandfathers also did the work, the other three came to it on their own, out of interest and desire. The training of the craft costs time and determination—it takes a minimum of six years to begin a professional career as a carver. Working one's way through apprenticeship in tools and labor eventually allows the aspiring carver time to practice on scraps lying about at the work site. Practicing chipping away at solid stone is done over lunch breaks and free time. Once the apprentice feels he is able to make rough forms, he approaches the construction coordinator out of his own volition to apply for a position. Several years are spent learning how to smooth surfaces and carve general pictorial forms, yet the exquisite details of Hindu temples are left only to the very experienced master *silpis*.

The temple structure is not erected simply by standing pillars and stone to form several chambers and entry ways. There is a sacred science that informs the architectural engineering of such a special space.

The temple architect, called a *sthapati*, is a trained engineer and designer who is fluently versed in the sacred mathematical formulas that are used to plan all temple structures. One of the *silpis* said, "For every 100 *silpis*, there are only two *sthapati* in India." While many *silpis* may aim toward one day becoming a *sthapati*, the "sacred knowledge of spiritual mathematics is dearly coveted," said Yoginathaswami. The Iraivan Temple in Wailua is constructed based on an 11-foot, 7-1/4 inch pattern that was derived from calculations of astrological positioning, the temple's honored Deity, Siva, and the founding Gurudeva's name. This spiritual architectural calculation is meant to connect the divine and the material.

"From their perspective, even after years of professional expertise, the *silpis* have the technical knowledge, but they lack the theoretical wisdom used in the actual design of the space," Yoginathaswami said.

The extensive meaning in each and every aspect of the temple, pictorially defining a complex theology, hints at the depth of how this structure is already a place of divinity and worship. The visiting artists feel that their experience working here has been "life-transforming and illuminating." They

explained the drastic difference between working on a typical temple project in India and Kauai's temple, "We credit Gurudeva, the founder of the temple, for making the working experience be a spiritual experience. At other jobs, you arrive in the morning and work all day. If you make a mistake, you are fired on the spot. Gurudeva felt that this work should be peaceful and joyful. We begin each day with communal worship and prayer. This unites us in our cause and work, and the mood is carried throughout the day. No matter what our individual beliefs, we are united when it comes to this project. Gurudeva insisted that we carve everything by hand in the tradition of Hindu temples in India—this has greatly improved our skills as *silpis*."

The building of the temple begins on a large construction site in Bangalore, India, where the *sthapati* oversees many carvers who flesh out the pillars in rough form. As each of the 3,000 pieces of stone is completed, it makes its journey by sea to Nawiliwili Harbor on Kauai and up to the Wailua property to slowly be placed and then finished by the resident artisans. The details that the carvers are fashioning are so intricate and expansive that it is difficult to fathom this is all being done with rough chisels held by 12 hands.

On monthly outings over the past 20 months, the artisans have visited every tourist site on the island—from the famous Waimea Canyon to the wild jungles of Napali Coast. But when asked what their favorite spot to visit is, they sheepishly said, "Wal-Mart." The spectacle of "having everything from 100 stores in one single store is fascinating to them." Yoginathaswami said. "We have also taken them for coffee at the Grand Hyatt and Princeville Hotel—this is something they could never arrange to do in their own country." Tourist resorts are carefully guarded in India and non-guests are not allowed on the premises.

The two years the artists have spent working on Kauai seem short in the lifetime of the structure they are building. The *silpis* expressed their gratitude for the opportunity and experience, but the temple will last far beyond the years of any current resident or worker. Chipping away at time is the task of these master craftsmen.

Yoginathaswami recounted a story from a recent visitor: "After touring the construction site, the visitor remarked how we often look at great world monuments, temples and ancient structures and wonder what it was like when they were building them. This is one we can all be witness to." Long after the temple is finished, the echoes of the "chip, chip, chip" of these *silpi* artisans will eternally be housed in the stone, and visitors from all over the world will marvel at who could have done this, and how.



Profile in carving: (left to right, top to bottom) M. Karupaiah with the stone carver's tools, A. Manikandan, A. Vellaismy, S. Rajendran, side view of Iraivan Temple in early 2007, S. Pandi, Kumar Subban and V. Chellaiya. They bring a wonderful religious spirit to their work, worshipping in the Hindu way every morning before beginning, and observing the annual Ayudha Puja festival when workers, the work site and all tools are blessed.



SOCIETY

Earthen Building Makes a Big Return

FORTY PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION live in earthen dwellings. The most enduring earth building, Egypt's adobe Ramasseum, still stands (though damaged) after 3,300 years. In China's Fujian Province there are 30,000 earth buildings, dating mostly from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. India's oldest earthen building, the Tabo Monastery in Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, built in 996, is still in use, having withstood Himalayan winters for a thousand years.

With the 20th century came the use of concrete, steel, treated lumber and all manner of synthetic materials, with serious consequences. Our rapacious thirst for lumber is stripping forests. And for every ton of concrete we produce, we generate one ton of greenhouse gas emissions. More pollution is caused by the need to transport these materials and to heat and air-condition the poorly designed buildings. Furthermore, many modern building materials continuously outgas toxic chemicals into the home or workplace for the inhabitants to breathe. Concerned builders are going "green" and turning back to the oldest building material: earth.

Imagine a healthy home, heated by the sun, cool in the summer without the noise of loud furnaces and air-conditioners. Such a home supports a non-polluting, sustain-



RICK E. MARTIN, MCT

Earth dwellings, ancient and new: clockwise, Auroville Dhyanalinga Meditation Center dome when under construction; the finished dome; 9th century Tabo Monastery; 13th century Chuxi circular community dwellings, China; 4-story Vikas Apartments, Auroville; ramming earth wall corners in India; modern home in Palo Alto, California

able economy and pays for itself over time.

Want to know more? The best starting place is www.earth-auroville.com. Here is a wealth of history, international links and marvelous photos. You can find out all about soil classifications, dry or solid, humid, plastic, liquid and the 12 different basic earth building methods, such as earth dug out, cut blocks, rammed earth, poured earth, stacked earth, "cob," adobe and its modern descendent, compressed earth blocks. Be ready to toss out preconceived

"mud hut" notions. People are building exquisitely beautiful homes as well as huge structures that will last a millennia and withstand hurricanes and earthquakes long after modern buildings have turned to rubble.

Google "earth builders" to find builders in your area, and see www.eartharchitecture.org, www.greenhomebuilding.com and www.greenbuilder.com.



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SCRIPTURES

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and articles. It is a simple but huge treasure chest, all in a single location and all in excellent, readable modern English.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

NEW FUND ENSURES SPIRITUAL FUTURE OF USA TEMPLE

Devotees of the Murugan Temple in Lanham, Maryland have enlisted the services of the Hindu Heritage Endowment to ensure the ceremonial and spiritual future of their temple. Pooling their contributions, they created the Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund, (fund #70.) “Some of us want to support the temple even after we leave this world,” said temple board member Dr. Nigel Subramaniam Siva. “We’re initially aiming to build the fund to \$300,000.” At five percent, he estimates the fund would provide \$15,000 annually for puja supplies. As the fund grows, any income in excess of the supplies budget will be applied to priest salaries and benefits.



Puja Fund Creators at Murugan Temple

“It’s very simple,” adds Atchuthan Sriskandarajah. “I thought that the fund should be created so that we can further insure that the pujas are done well for the community at large now and in the future.” “My contribution to the Puja Fund is an expression of my devotion to Lord Muruga,” explained Dr. Ken Kanagalingam, “It gives me great satisfaction that our Puja Fund at HHE will help our children, born into a different culture and perspective, continue our cherished Hindu traditions. It ensures that the temple will receive the resources needed to support the priests and their continued performance of daily temple rituals in an uninterrupted and proper manner.” Kanagasabai Loganathan co-created the Puja Fund at HHE to encourage the next generation to preserve their Hindu heritage. “We asked our three adult children to contribute to the fund with us,” he said. “We wanted to help them develop the habit of supporting the temple. We found the Puja Fund a safe, satisfying, sustainable vehicle by which we can support our temple. We hope we will be able to give to the fund regularly.”

“My late husband Arumukham Saravanapavan visited Kauai in 1982,” recalls Pathmini Saravanapavan. “He told Gurudeva that our community wanted to build a temple, and Gurudeva sent a Ganesha to our home in Bethesda, telling us, ‘Pray to him and slowly he will help you build a temple.’ He said our temple would ‘last more than a thousand years.’ It gave me great joy to hear that. In my small way, I want to make sure this happens because of my love for Muruga and my belief in Gurudeva’s words.” In 2003 Pathmini opened two Murugan Temple funds with HHE.

Dr. Sabapathippillai Kulathungam feels the Puja Fund at HHE links his Murugan temple in Maryland with the Iraivan Temple in Kauai and, through it, with Hindu temples worldwide. “Like many tributaries join to form a single river, all divisions of Hinduism merge within the single Iraivan,” he said. Temple trustee Vayudeva Varadan shared his hope for the future of the temple. “I believe Murugan Temple’s priests and the pujas they deliver bring unique light and life to the temple. As the years pass, I expect the feeling to build and grow. Even now, people travel to our Nallur Festival from all over the US and Canada. I suspect it is the same feeling that motivates thousands of people to walk barefoot for days to reach the great temples in India.”

Dr. Siva hopes others will contribute to the Puja Fund both to ensure the temple’s future and to honor their loved ones as he has done for his parents. Siva, who holds a Doctorate in Water Resources Engineering, credits his parents for much of his professional success, as well as his religious formation. Devotees purchased land for the temple in 1987. The temple was finished in 1999, with Gurudeva attending the Kumbhabhishekam. “My personal experiences at the Temple have convinced me that the high spiritual presence of the divine is there,” Dr. Siva said. “I want to make sure this divine presence continues to grow there so that others will benefit spiritually.” Please visit the temple at www.murugantemple.org.



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Upcoming Project

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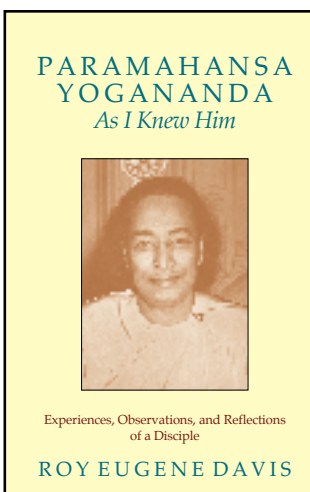
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00:00	Aastha Special Programmes	20:40	Discourses - Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev	17:20	Mangal Maitri	16:30	Talks on Bhagvad Geeta (Jaya Row)
00:30	Discourses - Swami Anubhavanandji	21:00	Discourses - Rameshbhai Oza	17:30	Aarti / Chalisa / Drashnam	17:00	Sukhabodhanandaji/Sun: Kirishanmurty
01:00	Aasa Di Ji War Sahib-Gurubani	22:00	Ramkatha - Morari Babu	18:00	Discourses - Bramrishi Kumar Swamiji	17:20	Mangal Maitri (only Saturday)
03:00	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)	23:00	Guided Fortune	18:30	Discourses (Pujya Deepakbhai Desai)	17:30	Aarti / Chalisa / Drashnam (Only Sat)
03:20	Bhai Chamanjit Singh Kirtan Darbar	23:20	Crystal Show	19:00	Swami Ramdev (Yoga)	18:00	Discourses - Bramrishi Kumar Swamiji
03:40	Discourses - Swami Adgadanandji	23:00	Discourses - Swami Gyananandji	20:00	Gyan Ganga(Narayan Seva Sansthan)	18:30	Prabhu Milan
04:00	Discourses (Anandmurti Gurumaa)			20:20	Aastha Special	19:00	Swami Ramdev (Yoga) Eng Episode
04:20	Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapurji			20:40	Bhakti Ras	20:00	Gyan Ganga/ Sunday -Mangal Bhavna
04:40	Mangal Maitri / Aarti / Darshnam	00:00	Aastha Special Programmes	21:00	Discourses - Rameshbhai Oza	20:20	Aastha Special
05:30	Swami Ramdev (Yoga)	00:30	Discourses - Swami Anubhavanandji	22:00	Ramkatha - Morari Babu	20:40	Aastha Special / Sun: Gyan Ganga
08:00	Discourses - Pujya Dr. Niruben Amin	01:00	Aasa Di Ji War Sahib-Gurubani	23:00	Discourses (Anandmurti Gurumaa)	21:00	Discourses - Rameshbhai Oza
08:30	Discourses - Avdeshanandgiriji	03:00	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)			22:00	Ramkatha - Morari Babu
09:00	Vipassana (Satyanarayan Goenkaji)	03:20	Bhai Chamanjit Singh Kirtan Darbar			23:00	Discourses (Anandmurti Gurumaa)
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11:00	Discourses - Sant Asaram Vani	05:30	Swami Ramdev (Yoga)	03:00	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)		
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15:00	Discourses - Chinmaya Mission	09:20	Discourses - Nithyanandji Maharaj	04:20	Discourses - Swami Adgadanandji		
15:30	Hazur Maharaz Tarlochan Darshan Dasji	09:40	Discourses - Jinchandraji Maharaj	04:40	Discourses (Anandmurti Gurumaa)		
16:00	Didi Maa: Ritambhara ji	10:00	Discourses - Ratanjit Sondhe	04:20	Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapurji		
16:30	Talks on Bhagvad Geeta (Jaya Row)	10:30	Discourses - Chitrabhanuji	04:40	Mangal Maitri / Aarti / Darshnam		
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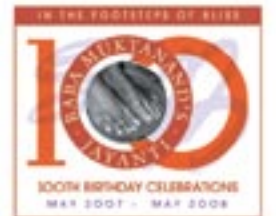
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white on pine TS33

white on purple TS40

white on orange TS39

white on azelea (pink) TS37

white on maroon TS38

black on gray TS29

white on light blue TS34

maroon on yellow TS32

light blue on white TS35

light blue on navy TS36

maroon on gold TS31



Stone & Pearl Prayer Beads - 108 beads plus head bead with tassel, on
woven color coordinated nylon knotted between each bead, about 8mm.

Adventurine ADJB, **White Jade** WJB, **Crystal** CJB,

Yellow Jade YJB, **Rose Quartz** RQJB **\$14 each;**

Amethyst AJB, **Carnelian** CNJB, **Malechite** MAJB **\$15 each;**

Tiger Eye TEJB, **Turquoise** TJB **\$18 each;** **Pearl** PJB **\$23 each.**



Sleepy Baby Ganesh
mouse and laddus are
separate pieces; 3 by 6
inches, **\$8** K36



Shiva Junior

3.5 inches, **\$4** A07M

Green Sandalwood Opulent ॐ Beads

Exotic sandalwood from Paraguay, with beauti-
ful fine grain, is originally brown
but turns green in

sunlight.
Each 10
mm. bead (shown
actual size) is
inscribed with ॐ.
The mala has 108
beads plus tasselled
head bead, all
strung on woven
nylon knot-
ted between
beads.

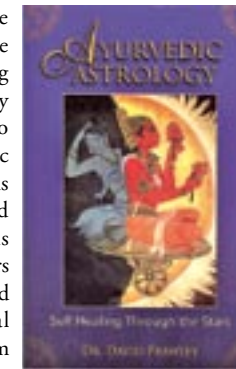
\$14 OMB



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I pitched my mind
In the Temple of Wisdom;
In Despair.
The dogs of desire
Howling at my gates.
A King no longer a King
In his Kingdom.

The Captain of Desire
With a bewitching smile,
Sits my left.

The General of Light
In silence, HE sits
On my right.

The assaulting pain.
of inner conflicts
suffocates me...

My Lord of Light,
Show me the WAY
To inner peace.

My child of restless heart.
Go into the depths of silence
And listen.

The Bliss that comes
From the silence of stillness
Is fleeting for many;
Eternal abidance
In Bliss is rare,
Only for a few
And far apart.

The world is not an illusion;
Your life on Earth is real
But "temporary."

In a world of deceit and deception,
Terror and horror, joy and sorrows,
In a world perfectly imperfect,
What "inner peace" do you seek?

A true soldier on the war front
Fights without hatred,
Lives moment to moment.
Fearlessness is his inner peace.
His valour gives strength
To his parents
He is dear to ME.

My child, be that soldier.
You are a soul on pilgrimage
In matter dense.
Steel is made
From the furnace of fire;
A soul matures in the body's heat.

Seek then contentment:
Ground your self
In the subject of your study.
See the level of competence rise.
You will blossom
Into an authority in your field.
Read a good book—be inspired;
Feel the thrill of inspiration.

Support an orphanage;
Set a child on a firmer footing;
Compassion flowers.

Build your financial empires;
Create employment opportunities.

Defend yourself but with love.
Tune your mind to accept
The unacceptable.

My sages are not called
"Paramahansa" by accident
But because, like swans,
They distinguish milk from water.
Seek then the milk
Of the energy of the cosmos
And nourish your body and soul.
Meditate Daily.

Transcend race and religion;
Then, feel the bliss of spirituality.

You may lose battles;
But win the war:
Complete your life on Earth.

Scream in despair;
But pick up your self and walk.
Be a light to others in distress.

Let go, bear no grudges;
Lest the dark and dense energy
Destroy you.

Struggle and strive;
The WAY opens.
Seek the peace that
Comes from management
Of your mismanagement;
"Damage control."

Live within your means;
Balance your monthly budget;
Feel the freedom from debts.
Keep your house clean,
Your garden fluttering with flowers;
The beauty of your home
Will be in the light of your eyes.
Bring not tears to another;
Be free from the burden of guilt.

The time for Resolutions
Has Arrived.
Strengthen your inner being.

My child, I give you
Today courage,
Courage in adversity,
Your only "inner peace" on Earth.

My Quest for Inner Peace
by Dr Arjunan Subramaniam
24 November - 6 December 2006